COMPARATIVE IMAGES: EUROPE AND AMERICA IN THE THOUGHT OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON

by

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ABSTRACT

Due to the great emphasis which has been placed on the political aspects of American history for the middle period of the nineteenth century, America's reaction during the era to her impressions of European culture has not aroused much scholarly interest until recently. One of the best, but hitherto slighted, exemplars of one who considered America in light of his image of Europe was Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose career spanned the period. Emerson frequently, even as a young boy in Boston, heard news about European affairs, read much about Europe, especially in the 1820's, and traveled through many parts of Western Europe in 1832-33, in 1847-48, and again in the

late 1870's. His reactions to what he heard and read, his observations on what he saw in Europe, and his reflections as expressed in his journals, works, and letters throughout his career reveal that, starting about the time of his great oration, "The American Scholar" (1837), and continuing to the close of his active career in the 1870's, Emerson compared Europe and America, thought of America in terms of what he observed in and about Europe, and personally illustrated an awareness of a cultural interaction of the two continents.

Emerson studied great men in both Europe and America, compared them, and found them to possess superior and representative qualities which set them in an elevated position from which they could teach others. He responded with a genuine feeling of admiration to the Saxon traits which he found displayed in the English and their achievements and called upon the Americans, who were an extension of the English into new and better conditions, to develop their superior Saxon characteristics. He observed European institutions, especially those of England, and, in making comparisons between them and those in America, concluded that, while America would do well to copy some

facets of English institutions, generally, American institutions, when properly altered and taken as a whole, were better for her. He pointed to some reforms which had been granted by European nations as examples which America might follow and compared facets of other American reform movements to European conditions, men, and reform activity. He thought of how nature had conspired to give the English a beneficial geography which had made them prosperous and believed that America with her bountiful gifts from nature would one day be great, too. Finally, he studied European art, literature, and architecture, complained that, by comparison, our accomplishments in these areas were not impressive, and called for us to rectify the situation.

One of the chief results of Emerson's application of his impressions of Europe to America was his cultural nationalistic plea for America to cease her mere imitation of European culture and (in a cosmopolitan spirit) to use the examples of European achievement as an inspiration to develop her own potential as the future cultural leader of the world.

PREFACE

The theme of this thesis is derived largely from a history seminar at Appalachian State University, in the spring of 1969, which had as its purpose the testing of the idea that, in spite of a strong emphasis within the United States on internal political affairs in the mid-nineteenth century decades (roughly speaking, 1840-1870), there was a meritable amount of cultural interaction between Europe and America for the period. It was pointed out in the seminar that, while there was still much work to be done in the area, the problem was receiving more acceptance and attention recently than it had in the past. As early as 1939, R. B. Mowat in his Victorian Age; the Age of Comfort and Culture had written

that "it would be stupid to regard any country by itself in the nineteenth century, particularly in the middle period. Ideas passed from continent to continent, and culture was pooled among the civilized peoples of the world."[1] The 1960 edition of the New Cambridge Modern History echoed the same topic when it explicitly stated that between 1830 and 1870 an "Atlantic Civilization" was in the making and recalled that Walt Whitman had seen in his poems "through Atlantica's depths pulses American Europe reaching, pulses of Europe duly return'd."[2] A year later, Charles L. Sanford in The Quest for Paradise, Europe and the American Moral Imagination developed the idea in his treatment of America's image of her destiny as compared to her concept of an old corrupt Europe; and, in 1963, Cushing L. Strout wrote a history of the "New World" impression of Europe as it has influenced American development in a book appropriately called The American Image of the Old World.

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[1] R. B. Mowat, Victorian Age: The Age of Comfort and Culture (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1939), pp. 95, 8.

[2] J. P. T. Bury, ed., The Zenith of European Power, 1830-1870, Vol. X: The New Cambridge Modern History (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1960), p. 2.

It is the object of this thesis to investigate the cultural inter-relationship as reflected in the thinking of America's "first philosopher" and chief cultural nationalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the height of whose career spanned the decades, 1830's-1870's. The approach is to look at Emerson's impressions of European aspects of selected topics as he related them to America and, simultaneously, at selected phases of American society as he associated them with Europe.

In spite of Emerson's central position in most questions revolving around mid-nineteenth century American intellectual history and particularly the question of American cultural nationalism, the books of Strout and Sanford tend to slight discussion of their themes over the Civil War and Reconstruction decades and of Emerson's thought in connection with their themes. Even Emerson's chief biographers, James Elliot Cabot (1888) and Ralph L. Rusk (1949), fail to specifically emphasize his comparison of European images with the American situation, although they inadvertently mention occasional examples of it in their discussions of other topics. Similarly, works analytical of Emerson's thought inadequately treat the theme. Sherman Paul's Emerson's Angle

of Vision, for example, devotes only about two pages to it by discussing Emerson's interpretation of the praise of Englishmen as praise of the Americans.[3] Likewise, while R. W. B. Lewis in The American Adam (1955) devotes full chapters to the call of Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and others for an American "Adam" to succeed the old European heroes, he deals only intermittently with Emerson's thoughts on the matter.

I am indebted to Dr. Eugene Drozdowski of Appalachian State University for his presentation of the theme in the seminar, for his aid in helping me to choose and define the subject, and for supervising my research and writing of this thesis.

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[3]Sherman Paul, Emerson's Angle of Vision (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 225-26.

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COMPARATIVE IMAGES: EUROPE AND AMERICA IN THE THOUGHT OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON

CHAPTER I

THE IMPACT OF PREPARATORY INFLUENCES

In an old parish house in Boston, the "fourth child and third son of the Reverend William and Ruth (Haskins) Emerson was born, on the 25th of May, 1805."[1] Had he personally been given the choice of his birth-date, the babe, Ralph Waldo, might well have chosen the same time, for as Ralph L. Rusk, his leading biographer, has noted:

> The year 1803 was a good year for an American to be born in. On the day of Ralph Waldo's birth, Reuben Puffer, the guest of the Emerson's, uttered some truths that turned out to be not wholly unrelated to that event. For nations, as well as for individuals, he said in his election sermon, these were times when heaven was propitious. Now the United States came forward to enjoy their day. The future hung upon the fate of America, and she was a spectacle watched by the whole world.[2]

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[1] James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1887), I, 3.

[2] Ralph L. Rusk, The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Columbia Press, 1949), p. 14.

Like those of other typical youngsters, the earliest experiences of Ralph Waldo centered in his home. Here, at least for eight years, his father dominated and set "persuasive examples." The Reverend William's "attendance on learned societies," his preaching, and his "literary labor" all must have made some favorable impression on the future intellectual. Unfortunately, however, these influences were cut short by the father's death in the spring of 1811.[3] The misfortune left the family in poverty and dependent largely upon the charity of friends and parishioners. As a result, his mother's energies were so taxed by the practical task of providing for her family that Ralph filled the vacancy not by an increased closeness to his mother, but to his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson. Aunt Mary combined the "Moody enthusiasm and impetuosity and a good shave of Puritan rigor" with "a keen appreciation of modern ideas" and left their brand on the future reformer and religious rebel.[4] She "liked solitude," "found a kind of mystical delight in nature," and imparted these attitudes to one who would later speak of individual self-reliance and of the influence of nature.[5] In addition, it was she who instilled in the young Ralph his love of reading and of serious

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[3]Ibid., p. 28; Cabot, Memoir, I, 26.

[4]Cabot, Memoir, I, 30.

[5]Rusk, Life, p. 24.

discussion.[6] Like her nephew, who later would be described as having a "dualistic nature," Aunt Mary was a "bundle of contradictions." She was simultaneously a mystic, a "fiery Calvinist," and a "liberal daughter of the Enlightenment," and tried to teach Ralph accordingly.[7] On the Calvinist side, she was reinforced by Emerson's mother who expected her son to digest Sunday sermons so well that he could recapitulate outlines and texts. While this was not without impact on the young life, "the terror of the 'crack of doom' must have been lessened for Emerson," Rusk says, by "his saving sense of the ridiculous . . . , and the harrowing of the emotions in youth was sure to have important repercussions" in the making of a future religious liberal.[8] In her assertion of liberal ideas, Aunt Mary was reinforced by the neighbors, for Emerson was greatly influenced by the "community in general," and the "Bostonian community of the time was more progressive than conservative."[9]

At nine, Ralph entered the Boston Latin School. There, the headmaster, a Mr. Gould, emphasized good speaking to the future lecturer and devoted Saturday morning exclusively to it. It was there also that composition was emphasized and that the future essayist

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[6]Frederic Ives Carpenter, Emerson Handbook (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1953), p. 5.

[7]Rusk, Life, p. 24.

[8]Ibid., p. 55.

[9]Carpenter, Handbook, p. 5.

and poet learned to be critical in expression.[10] As far as achievement in specific subjects was concerned, Emerson did poorly, but he did reveal an "insatiable curiosity about history" and especially about "its biographical parts," an indication perhaps of the ideas which the future author of "History" and of Representative Men would express.[11]

In 1817, after receiving the promise that he would be appointed "President's freshman" and would be granted "other privileges," Emerson entered Harvard College. Although his college studies did not receive the "individual attention which the authorities wished and expected," he did learn valuable lessons at Harvard.[12] The room to which he was assigned was under the president's study. From this location, he was able to take "lessons in human nature" as he watched that worthy president "in the routine administration of academic law" or "quelling a riot between town and gown. . . ."[13] In addition, the demands of some of the professors helped him direct his thoughts toward later conclusions. On one occasion, for example, the future expounder of the impact of geography and environment on men had to write

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[10]Cabot, Memoir, I, 41-42.

[11]Rusk, Life, p. 68.

[12]Cabot, Memoir, I, 50, 54.

[13]Rusk, Life, p. 65.

an essay for William Ellery Channing on the "influence of weather and skies on the mind."[14] Emerson learned these lessons, and many others, before being graduated from Harvard in 1821. At his graduation, he was belatedly chosen class poet and adopted the theme which dominated his future thinking: he bewailed Europe's unhappy destiny while congratulating America on her noble future. On the same day, Robert Bushnell, the class valedictorian, had said similarly:

> The childhood of our country has past. . . . We have broken from the mental thraldom, under which a foreign literature had too long confined us. . . . We will live for ourselves. . . .[15]

From Harvard, Emerson went to Boston to help keep a school for young ladies. He was an unwilling schoolmaster, however, and sought consolation in reading history, particularly on European subjects. Meanwhile, his mother moved from Boston to a "woodland district" about four miles away. Here the future author of "Nature" and promoter of the acceptance of geographical influences had his appreciation of nature again reinforced as he went on long walks with his brother Edward.[16]

In 1825, following the tradition of the male members of his family, Emerson decided to study for the

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[14] Ibid., p. 80.

[15] Ibid., p. 84.

[16] Cabot, Memoir, I, 83-84.

ministry at Harvard Divinity School. Almost immediately after his entrance, however, his eyesight weakened and he had to withdraw temporarily to the country until it improved. During this period, he may have worked on a farm, but at any rate he lived close to the soil in a rural community where for another time he would be instructed by the power of nature.[17] Eventually, he returned to Harvard and as a result was "approbated to preach" by the Middlesex Association of Ministers in October, 1826. Thirty months later, he was "ordained as a colleague of Mr. Ware" at the Second Church in Boston.[18] To be pastor of the Second Church was an honor and the salary was good, but Emerson remained there only three years. In 1832, in a move that changed the course of his life, he resigned his office as a result of his liberal religious beliefs.[19] In making the break, Emerson significantly redefined his role as a "religious teacher more broadly as the American scholar, and spoke with eloquence from the lecture platform instead of the pulpit." As Frederic Ives Carpenter says: "Emerson failed as the minister of a small parish of a minor sect, in order that he might succeed as a minister to all serious and thoughtful people throughout America and Europe."[20]

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[17]Rusk, Life, p. 113.

[18]Cabot, Memoir, I, 118, 146.

[19]Ibid., pp. 154-59.

[20]Carpenter, Handbook, p. 15.

In June, 1827, during his ministry, Emerson had journeyed through the South for his health. In St. Augustine the future reformer and active speaker for emancipation was shocked and angered at discovering that while sitting in the cathedral hearing the "glad tidings of great joy" he could also hear shouts of "Going, gentlemen, going!" coming from the slave auction next door.[21] On the same trip he met and became friends with Achille Murat, an impressive Frenchman and nephew of Napoleon, and apparently enjoyed exchanging views with him concerning significant developments in Europe and America. In addition, as he had passed through Charleston on his way to St. Augustine he had been reminded that, for the first time, he was on American soil outside New England and was struck by signs of the sectional differences, especially in manners. This strengthened the future author of "Manners" and writer about the influence of geography in his already formulated belief that "manners were closely under the influence of climate."[22]

Like many young men, Emerson had met a lovely young woman and had fallen in love. As a result, in September, 1829, he had been married to Ellen Tucker, a delicate girl of seventeen.[23] Less than a year and a

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[21]Cabot, Memoir, I, 123-24.

[22]Rusk, Life, pp. 121, 119.

[23]Cabot, Memoir, I, 146.

half later she had died, but during that short period she had been able to stir Emerson more than anyone else had ever done or would do.[24] Emerson never recovered from her death, and when four years later, he married Lydia Jackson, he told her of his abiding love for Ellen. Ellen's death was not the only unexpected personal tragedy which Emerson experienced. In 1836, his brother Charles died suddenly. That blow was softened by the birth of his first son, Waldo, in the same year, but six years later he, too, died. These experiences in suffering, as Carpenter perhaps overemphasizes, helped to give the frequently idealistic Emerson a psychology which was "pragmatic rather than romantic" and made him seek "to heal the scars of tragedy by a life of action rather than to cultivate them for purposes of artistic exploitation."[25]

Not long after he resigned from the ministry, Emerson's health broke down and he determined to regenerate with a visit to Europe. Accordingly, he sailed from Boston on Christmas Day, 1832, and entered Europe to study "what this foreign culture had to offer." His observations were many and only sharpened his ability to compare Europe and America. The future commentator on American and European art beheld European art and feared that such talent would not soon cross the ocean to America. The future commentator upon nationalities and

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[24]Rusk, Life, p. 149.

[25]Carpenter, Handbook, pp. 22-23, 10-12.

racial traits arrived in France while Louis Philippe was still newly in power, did not find the beginning of a French "millennium," was "impatient at not discovering men and ideas" there, and, as a result, did not reduce his prejudice against the French.[26] He saw a "dirty suburb full of beggars" in Italy and spoke of the Italians as degenerate.[27] The future author of English Traits visited London and was impressed by the English people and by their traits as revealed in their achievements.[28] Throughout his entire journey, the future advocate of a distinctive American architecture observed European cathedrals and wondered why Americans, after seeing such structures, built "such mean structures at home."[29] The future author of Representative Men and increasingly rebellious American visited men like Carlyle and Wordsworth and found in them kindred spirits who encouraged him.[30] In addition to contributing to the restoration of his health, then, Europe had served as one of the best school-rooms in which Emerson had been instructed. In Ralph Rusk's words:

> He had already begun to appraise the results of his seven months in foreign countries. First hand

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[26]Rusk, Life, pp. 174, 184-86.

[27]Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Edward W. Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (10 vols.; New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1912-14), III, 67-68.

[28]Ibid., p. 17.

[29]Ibid., p. 52.

[30]Rusk, Life, p. 165.

> acquaintance with Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle, and Wordsworth was worth thanking God for. It warranted his resolve that hereafter he would "judge more justly, less timidly of wise men." He was also prepared to judge foreign countries more confidently and more intelligently. He could understand well enough the feeling of the uninhibited Yankee with lip curled in scorn as he passed through Europe's ducal and royal palaces. Yet, he felt doubtful as well as proud when he remembered the young, self-assertive America to which he was returning. Though he had pretty definitely made up his mind to speak for himself and for his country, he was now traveled and experienced, not ignorant of the Old World, and so not singlehearted in his patriotism. Having also read much, he was steeped in the thought and feeling of other lands and other ages. He inevitably cared for what he judged the best that was thought and known anywhere in the world. It was therefore impossible for him to be a narrow minded nationalist. He had gone only that far toward a solution of the much discussed problem of American cultural independence when he arrived at New York on October 7, 1833.[31]

Upon his return from Europe, Emerson enjoyed better health than he had ever known and it was not until then that he began to feel safe from physical breakdown. Psychologically, this was significant, for as he became physically stronger, he became more social and, thus, more ready to accept the opportunities which would soon send him on a new departure in life as a lecturer.[32]

Within a few months, he had settled down permanently in Concord, the ancestral home of his family. In doing so, the future discoverer of hope for America in the West, as Carpenter points out, was "in a sense going West to a farming community where religion had not become

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[31] Ibid., p. 197.

[32] Carpenter, Handbook, pp. 9-10.

genteel, nor society stratified."[33] In addition, the future caller for reasonable reforms was going to a place which was affected by that strife. There, for example, Emerson found the Concord Temperance Society and the recently created Middlesex Anti-Slavery Society.[34] It was not long before he had begun to assert more positively his attitude toward the anti-slavery movement. He and Lydia were hosts to the Grimké sisters when they came to plea the anti-slavery cause in Concord, and shortly thereafter Emerson read an address on slavery in the Concord church.[35]

It was from the home base in Concord that Emerson began to travel and to lecture. His topics were many and varied, but his central theme remained generally consistent and was not interrupted, even by the Civil War. Indeed, it continued until the end of his active career in the 1870's. In keeping with the intellectual current of the 1830's and 1840's as expressed in such other writers as Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman, Emerson called for an American cultural nationalism. Advancing beyond the most strict cultural nationalists who wanted to break completely from European influences, he urged Americans to study European culture, to pattern some of their forms

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[33] Ibid., p. 6.

[34] Rusk, Life, p. 227.

[35] Ibid., p. 260.

after it, to be inspired by it, and to seize the opportunities of their land by developing a culture superior to that then current in Europe. One of the largest obstacles which he saw standing in the way of the maturing of the spirit needed for such a development was slavery. Thus, slavery became a subject on which he repeatedly spoke and over which he became progressively excited. To the abolitionists, at first Emerson appeared too cool and philosophical, but, by 1844, in his famous Concord address on the anniversary of the liberation of the slaves in the British West Indies, although still comparatively moderate in his views, he roused himself to the full sense of the occasion and thought of American emancipation in terms of that granted by the British.[36]

While teaching others and expanding his views on his lecture tours, Emerson in turn was being taught by the places and people in his path. On a trip to New York, as Rusk points out, he observed the "full tide of life in the crowded metropolis" and in so doing learned "timely lessons." It was here that the speaker for moderate reform was daunted by other reformers with their "precise and determined plans for saving the world;" it was here that the increasingly active fighter for emancipation was impressed by the tireless enthusiasm of men like Horace Greeley; and, it was here that the future critic

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[36] Ibid., pp. 425-26.

of the communal societies was exposed further to the Fourieristic ideas of Albert Brisbane.[37]

During these years, Emerson's friendship with the Englishman, Thomas Carlyle, and with a few New England intellectuals had grown significantly. In his exchange of letters with Carlyle, the author of "Self-Reliance" found reinforcement for his views on the virtues of sincerity and individualism which he would later find in the West. With Thoreau, in whom he later saw beneficient characteristics of the Saxon man, Emerson took many long walks and shared his views. In Alcott, the creator of "Nature" and expounder of geographical influences found suggestions of the most extreme transcendentalist ideas. From Margaret Fuller, the literary critic, writer for women's rights, and active worker for the Italian Revolt, he obtained many inspirations for his judging of American society, reform movements, and literature in comparison with Europe. The transcendentalist views of all the New England friends was strengthened by this exchange and, as a result, they began, in 1840, the publication of their own magazine, The Dial, in which they could express their views.[38]

By the mid-1840's, Emerson's popularity as a lecturer had risen so high that he began to receive

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[37] Ibid., pp. 287-89.

[38] Ibid., pp. 275-77.

invitations from England. This, Cabot has written, was just the stimulation which Emerson needed. Already Emerson was complaining that his study had grown "languid" and that the Americans were "too easily pleased."[39] Thus, the observer of European and American cultures sailed for Europe in 1847, typically "delivered a series of lectures at the un-literary cities of Liverpool and Manchester," and, only after persuasion, gave a "course in London before a more aristocratic and 'guinea-paying' audience."[40] Constantly between his lectures, Emerson traveled throughout England and purposely visited, observed, and studied English historical sites and individual Englishmen. As a result, he gathered a wealth of favorable impressions and comparisons with his countrymen which he was later to record in his book, English Traits.[41] He even found time, early in 1848, to visit France. Arriving there during the revolutionary activity of that year, he closely observed the revolution and the French people and filed away some comparisons with the American scene. The result was that he came away from France with his old anti-Gallic prejudice slightly corrected.[42] Returning home, Emerson could look back to fruitful visits

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[39]Cabot, Memoir, II, 495.

[40]Carpenter, Handbook, p. 19.

[41]Cabot, Memoir, II, 527; Journals, VII, 375.

[42]Journals, VII, 410; Rusk, Life, p. 351.

with European intellectuals and to observations of Britain and France in political and economic turmoil.[43] He was able to make comparisons with his fellow citizens and nation and was moved to write of "boundless" freedom in America. He was forced to add, however, that such freedom existed chiefly in the North since the cloud of slavery which moved over the South was daily growing darker.[44] In the face of this reality, then, and again enjoying robust health, Emerson more fervently continued his task of comparing America with Europe and of calling for improvements which would make his country the promised land of the future.[45]

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[43]Rusk, Life, p. 357.

[44]Journals, I, xiv.

[45]Rusk, Life, p. 360.

CHAPTER II

THE MORAL OF BIOGRAPHY

In a letter to Thomas Carlyle, August, 1834, Emerson wrote that so close was the interrelationship of England and America that they should not think of themselves as separate but should mutually adopt one another's great men.[1] In 1871, he was still pursuing the same theme when, in writing about men whose various powers had won his respect, he listed both an Englishman and several Americans. Among those whom he cited, for example, were Thomas Carlyle, Henry D. Thoreau, A. B. Alcott, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.[2]

These citations were all in keeping with Emerson's general view that "all history resolves itself very easily

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[1] Joseph Slater, ed., Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 102.

[2] Journals, X, 357.

into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."[3] He did not mean, however, that outstanding men were the chief shapers of history. Instead, he thought of them, as Philip Nicoloff has pointed out, as the agents "who to a pre-eminent degree represented the idea of their national epoch" and who derived their power "from their closeness to the general idea which motivated their times." They were not tyrants who forced the people to obey them, but representatives or "summaries of humanity" who embodied the divinely ordained desires of the people.[4] When he thought of Europe in these terms, Napoleon Bonaparte was one example that stood out in Emerson's mind. He noted, in 1849, that the first Napoleon had carried with him the "power and affections of vast numbers" and that, if Napoleon had represented France and Europe, it was because the people whom he swayed were "little Napoleons."[5] In similar manner, he noted at the end of the American Civil War, in April, 1865, that Abraham Lincoln had embodied the "true history of the American people in his time." Lincoln, Emerson said, had walked before the Americans,

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[3]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," Essays, Vol. II of The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (12 vols.; New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1883-93), p. 62.

[4]Philip Nicoloff, Emerson on Race and History, an Examination of English Traits (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 73.

[5]Emerson, "Napoleon," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 213.

moving slowly when they desired caution and quickening his pace when they increased theirs. He had been the "true father of his country" with "the pulse of twenty millions throbbing in his heart" and "the thought of their minds articulated by his tongue."[6] The achievements in history, then, Emerson concluded, are due not to the leader or even to the people, but to the prevalence of the embodied idea.[7]

The great men of whom Emerson spoke represented either the prevailing idea within their own country or certain ideas for all men everywhere and sometimes both. Their representation of the chief idea in their own country corresponded with Emerson's theory of history as revealed, in 1856, in his English Traits. Here he stated that nations evolved from a vigorous, savage state into a golden age "which resulted from the synthesis of an idea with the characteristic national trait." The emergence of the idea was usually signalled by the appearance of an outstanding representative figure. Subsequently, another dominant view or philosophy, perhaps antithetical to the first, would develop and in turn be summed up in its representative. Having used the examples of Europe

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[6]Emerson, "Abraham Lincoln," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 312.

[7]Emerson, The Method of Nature, Vol. I of Works, p. 208.

as a basis for his judgment, Emerson then looked to America and stated that our history would go through the same stages and each would be represented by its great men.[8]

Although Emerson believed America had not yet reached her Golden Age with her ideas embodied in one individual, he did note that she had great men who represented, as in Europe, the prevailing ideas of their eras. In his journals of 1852, for example, he pointed out that the European Napoleons, Cannings, Kossuths and Burkes, and the American Websters were the "inevitable patriots until they, too, wane and their defects and gout and palsy and money warp their politics."[9] In another place, he compared Thomas Carlyle and Daniel Webster by noting that they often behaved similarly and that each could view society on his own terms. He continued by stating, however, that, in spite of the likenesses between the two men and between their respective countries, Carlyle was so much an English national figure that he would in no manner "satisfy us [Americans], or begin to answer the questions which we ask." By implication, then, the reader may assume that Emerson believed that Webster was satisfactory as one of America's great representative men

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[8]Nicoloff, Emerson on Race and History, pp. 48-49.

[9]Journals, VIII, 335.

and could answer the questions they were asking during his era.[10]

In addition to citing our national great men alongside those in Europe, Emerson also pointed out that some of the chiefly national men in Europe had a message for America. Goethe, he wrote in 1849, by his habitual reference to interior truth, exhibited one of the main properties of his nation. In this respect, he was a German national representative. At the same time, his wisdom was of such universal nature as to speak to America, also.[11] Generally, however, Emerson felt that great men represented best the chief idea of their own nation. Thus, he wrote, for example, that Abraham Lincoln was "thoroughly American, had never crossed the sea," and "had never been spoiled by English insularity or French dissipation."[12]

Those men who represented certain ideas for all men everywhere had, as Frederic Ives Carpenter has pointed out, a universal quality which made them representative

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[10]Emerson, "Carlyle," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 456.

[11]Emerson, "Goethe, or the Writer," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, pp. 267-69.

[12]Emerson, "Abraham Lincoln," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 307.

of the "ideal and timeless potentialities of all mankind."[13] A man who was great enough to fit into this classification was one, Emerson said, "who inhabits a higher sphere of thought into which other men rise with labor and difficulty; he has but to open his eyes to see things in a true light . . . whilst they must make painful connections and keep a vigilant eye on many sources of error."[14] He was one who could feed the thought and imagination with pictures which "raise men out of the world of corn and money and console them."[15] The European poets, Emerson said, had been capable of accomplishing this, but not yet those in America. The United States had not then produced a genius who could compare with the great European Dante, who had written his autobiography into universality, or a Homer, who could be admired by all the world.[16] Indeed, Emerson believed, the entire race of scholars in America was a puny one which had "no counsel to give" and which was "not felt."[17]

Although he did not find a universal genius in America, in writing about European men who spoke for and

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[13]Carpenter, Handbook, p. 63.

[14]Emerson, "Uses of Great Men," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 12.

[15]Emerson, "Swedenborg, or the Mystic," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 91.

[16]Emerson, "The Poet," Essays, Vol. III of Works, pp. 11, 40.

[17]Journals, VII, 36.

to all mankind, Emerson occasionally used the names of great American national men to set off the universality of the Europeans. He once wrote, to cite an illustration, that "as Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Webster vote, so Locke and Rousseau think, for thousands."[18] Not only did he do this, but also he constantly referred to the influence that the European great men had on America. Shakespeare, he said, influenced our literature, philosophy, and thought and our ears were "educated to music by his rhythm."[19] On another occasion, he declared that he could think of no man who could be named whose mind still acted "on the cultivated intellect" of America with "an energy comparable to that of Milton."[20] In 1849, he stated that Plato possessed such a "broad humanity" that he spoke to every generation and appeared to a reader in New England as "an American genius."[21] In like manner, Emerson, in a 1842 journal entry, had noted that Homer's universality could make of an American scholar an "unlimited benefactor" who "adorns the land."[22]

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[18]Emerson, "Shakespeare, or the Poet," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 190.

[19]Ibid., p. 195.

[20]Emerson, "Milton," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 151.

[21]Emerson, "Plato, or the Philosopher," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, pp. 41-43.

[22]Journals, VI, 281.

In addition to those great European intellectual idealists who had an influence on America, Emerson also singled out specific practical outstanding Europeans who represented certain classes of men in America and throughout Europe. To him, Napoleon Bonaparte was the representative of the class of businessmen in America, in England, in France, and throughout Europe. Napoleon was the "incarnate Democrat," he said, who had the virtues, the vices, the spirit, and the aims of the middle class.[23] Likewise, though somewhat more idealistically, Robert Burns represented in the minds of men "that great uprising of the middle class against the armed and privileged minorities, that uprising which worked politically in the American and French Revolutions. . . ."[24] When Emerson wrote, in 1865, of the influence of Abraham Lincoln, he reversed the direction of the American and European interaction to indicate that Lincoln's death would cause much pain to all mankind because he represented "the mysterious hopes and fears, which in the present day are connected with the name and institutions of America."[25]

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[23]Emerson, "Napoleon, or the Man of the World," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 214.

[24]Emerson, "Robert Burns," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 366.

[25]Emerson, "Abraham Lincoln," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 307.

Occasionally, in his description of some of the great European thinkers, Emerson made reference to general American affairs rather than specific American counterparts. In an essay on Goethe, for example, he wrote that such superior men had a comprehensive eye which permitted them to avoid being confused by the "mumbo-jumbo" in such issues as the tariff, Texas, the railroads, Romanism, or California.[26]

Finally, in his thinking about the universal idealistic great men in relation to both America and Europe, Emerson wrote:

> . . . when the glory of Plato of Greece, of Cicero of Rome, and of Shakespeare of England shall have died, who are they that are to write their names where all time shall read them, and their words be the oracle of millions? Let those who would pluck the lot of Immortality from Fate's Urn, look well to the future prospects of America.[27]

Nevertheless, he concluded, we shall not worry if our hero or poet does not hasten to be born in America, for, "when he comes, we others must pack our petty trunks and be gone."[28]

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[26]Emerson, "Goethe, or the Writer," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, pp. 252-53.

[27]Journals, I, 202-203.

[28]Ibid., VIII, 345.

When Emerson asked himself what had made the great men outstanding, he noted that there was a close tie between person and event. In Fate, which was published in 1860, he wrote that "person makes event, and event person" and concluded that, when one talked about the "times" or "the age," actually he often was referring chiefly to a few persons who epitomized the times. Emerson's illustrations, in this instance, were Goethe, Hegel, Metternich, Peel, and Kossuth, on the one hand, and Calhoun and John Quincy Adams on the other.[29]

Two factors seemed especially important, Emerson believed, in the relationship between person and event. One was place; the other, time. Put a man in his proper place, he had written in 1849, and he would be constructive and fertile.[30] Men needed a "world" to bring out their talents and to make them great. If Napoleon Bonaparte had been on an island without any men to act upon, he would have appeared stupid, but since he lived in a complex dense population in a large country where his abilities were challenged, he emerged as a brilliant man. A Newton and a Laplace needed the "myriads of age and

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[29]Emerson, "Fate," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 43.

[30]Emerson, "Uses of Great Men," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 13.

thick-strewn celestrial areas" to make them outstanding. A Handel had to possess both an ear to create "harmonic sound" and an audience to appreciate it. In similar manner, the American, Robert Fulton, had to have constructive fingers to "predict the fusible, hard, and temperable texture of metals, the properties of stone water and wood" and his country's need.[31] Great men, then, Emerson believed, had used the "world" which they found and had done so in the place in which they finally found themselves. "The Jerseys," he wrote, "were handsome enough for Washington to tread, and London streets for the feet of Milton." Having used their abilities in the place where they were, the great men had reversed the direction of influence and made the lands where they lived outstanding, for "that country is the fairest which is inhabited by the noblest minds."[32]

As important as the place, however, Emerson wrote, was the time. Shakespeare's youth, for example, had fortunately fallen in a time when the English people "were importunate for dramatic entertainments."[33] A great man, then, had to possess qualities which were requested

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[31]Emerson, "History," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 39.

[32]Emerson, "Heroism," Essays, Vol. II of Works, pp. 247-48.

[33]Emerson, "Shakespeare, or the Poet," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 183.

in his age. "Other days will demand other qualities."[34]

During the American Civil War, Emerson again emphasized his old theme of the importance of the time and place. In this time of crisis America was looking for a master of the situation. Unfortunately, he noted, due to its inexperience, its past dependence on Europe, and its unwillingness to be independent and to respond to the beckoning potential of its own land, it had not yet found one, although it would in the future.[35] The person who then came closest to being master of the situation was Abraham Lincoln, but his qualities would probably have appeared, Emerson said, even greater in another period, for if Lincoln "had ruled in a period of less facility or printing, he would have become mythological in a very few years, like Aesop or Pilpay, or one of the Seven Wise Masters, by his fables and proverbs."[36]

In his search for those qualities which made men great, Emerson found them difficult to locate and to

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[34]Emerson, "Uses of Great Men," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 35.

[35]Journals, IX, 486.

[36]Emerson, "Abraham Lincoln," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 311.

judge. He noted that a personal influence was an "ignis fatuus." If people said it was great, then it was considered great, but if people contended that it was small, then it was small. This meant, Emerson decided, that greatness "borrows all its size from the momentary estimation of the speakers."[37] Thus, the fame of a great man was not fixed but changed with time and, indeed, might increase, due to a longer perspective. Milton, for example, had been important in the seventeenth century, had suffered a lapse in the eighteenth century, but recently had re-emerged as a great author. His prose writings were again regarded as remarkable compositions even if they were not as "effective" as "several masterly speeches in the history of the American Congress."[38] Greatness, then, Emerson believed, was "a property for which no man gets credit too soon; it must be possessed long before it is acknowledged."[39]

The heroes and great men which people of one age admired would not, however, Emerson said, always be permanently regarded as outstanding, for, as he wrote:

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[37]Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 218.

[38]Emerson, "Milton," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, pp. 145-47.

[39]Journals, I, 121-22.

> Every hero becomes a bore at last. Perhaps Voltaire was not bad-hearted, yet he said of the good Jesus, even, "I pray you, let me never hear that man's name again." They cry up the virtues of George Washington--"Damn George Washington!" is the Jacobin's whole speech and confutation.[40]

In a letter to Elizabeth Hoar on July 18, 1841, Emerson clearly implied that great Americans like great Europeans were "ploughing along our Main of Time gazed after by all eyes," but that they would "pass, too," for "all are fugitive."[41] There were, then, he concluded, in 1856, "no such men as we fable; no Jesus, nor Pericles, nor Caesar, nor Angelo, nor Washington as we have made."[42]

In seeking to judge great men, Emerson also noted that there was a problem created when two great men were expected to act alike. Too often when people saw a great man, he said, they fancied a resemblance to some historical person, predicted his future, and were disappointed when the sequel of his life did not accord with their expectations.[43] Yet, he wrote, a "perfect parallelism" did exist between most great men. "Luther's Pope and

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[40]Emerson, "Uses of Great Men," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 31.

[41]The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk (6 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press), II, pp. 428-29.

[42]Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 217.

[43]Emerson, "Character," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 106.

Turk and Devil, and Grace, and Justification, and Catherine de Bore, shall reappear under far other names in George Fox, in John Milton, in George Washington, in Goethe, or long before, in Zeno and Socrates."[44] Probably what Emerson meant was that the "perfect parallelism" existed if those who sought to judge great men were able to select the correct historical parallel. The problem was that often they were not able to do so and chose the wrong person to be the parallel of the man whom they were judging. He wrote conversely, for example, that, when a great man died, people explored the same class for his successor, but that they could find none, for the next Franklin or Plato might appear in an entirely different field. When men looked into the past, which in America, especially contained few outstanding illustrations, their mistake was that they looked in the same field and chose the wrong man.[45]

Having recognized the difficulty of judging great men and of determining what made them outstanding,

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[44] Journals, III, 362.

[45] Emerson, "Uses of Great Men," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 24.

Emerson cited some characteristics which he believed great men must possess. Above all, he constantly emphasized, they must be men of character, possessing such traits as strength and seriousness of purpose.[46] In 1832, he confided to his journals that if he wanted to write about great European men such as Luther, Shakespeare, and Alfred or about outstanding American men like John Adams, he would "not write lives" but would "draw characters."[47] Again in 1837, he emphasized the importance of character in the lives of both European and American men in writing of the "resistless effect" of "genuine virtue."[48] As late as 1870, Emerson was still referring to the decisive role character played in making European and American men great. Moral sentiment, he wrote on October 2 of that year, was the foundation of men like Milton, Wordsworth, and Michaelangelo. Men of rare talent like Webster and Byron who did not give this sentiment its "healthy or normal superiority" were great, but they also possessed a degree of "discord and limitation."[49] It should be said of a great man that, as

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[46]Raymer McQuiston, The Relation of Ralph Waldo Emerson to Public Affairs (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1923), p. 57.

[47]Journals, II, 504.

[48]Ibid., IV, 183.

[49]Ibid., X, 331.

Bishop Burnet said of Sir Isaac Newton, he "had the whitest soul I ever knew." In America, Emerson thought, Charles Sumner fitted this description.[50]

The role character played in making a man great lay to a large degree in its recognition by others and in its influence on others. Early in his career, Emerson noted the "vast influence exercised on men's minds" by the character of Franklin.[51] Almost fifty years later, in 1870, he emphasized that character included the spirit of justice. When he thought of an American great man who might best exemplify this trait, he recalled Milton's picture of the European, John Bradshaw, sitting in proper judgment on others, and the name of the American, Judge Samuel Hoar, began to stand out in his mind.[52]

In addition to the cumulative traits which contributed to moral character, Emerson also believed that great men must possess and display courage and will. In every nation's history, he wrote, there were men like Cromwell, Caesar, and Napoleon who had shown great courage. Nevertheless, the characteristic was so rare that

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[50]Emerson, "Speech on the Assault upon Mr. Sumner," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 236.

[51]Journals, I, 376.

[52]Emerson, "Samuel Hoar," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 411.

men had talked for two thousand years about Thermopylae and Salamis and were still greatly impressed in America by Bunker Hill and by Washington's endurance.[53]

Emerson had words of praise especially for those who, as he saw it, had stood for noble causes and who had courageously faced opposition and even death as a result. No better example could be found in America than that of John Brown whom Emerson described as "the hero of Kansas."[54] It was John Brown's merit, he said, in 1860, like that of the Europeans, Luther, Knox, and Latimer, to "speak tart truth, when that was peremptory and when there were few to say it."[55]

In thinking about the role strong will played in the lives of great men, Emerson automatically thought of both Europeans and Americans. In early 1834, he wrote that since the "greatness of men of the first ages, Homer and Alfred [are] equal to Goethe and Washington, does it not seem that a little additional force of will in the individual is equivalent to ages-ful of the improvements we call civilization?" About the same time, he had

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[53]Emerson, "Courage," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, pp. 241-42.

[54]Ibid., p. 255.

[55]Emerson, "John Brown," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 271.

written that every formidable statesman, whether an American Webster, Adams, or Clay or an European Chatham, was a willful man.[56] In 1878, Emerson was still writing about how rare were acts of will and finding laudatory exclamations to describe John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. He noted that men of will were courageous forward-looking people. "Columbus," he said, "was no backward-creeping crab, nor was Martin Luther, nor John Adams, nor Patrick Henry, nor Thomas Jefferson."[57]

Emerson often asserted his belief that great men must have the "restraining grace" of common sense. He pointed out that the European valid minds like Aristotle, Alfred, Luther, Napoleon, and Shakespeare were marked by it and that Benjamin Franklin showed the trait to no less degree.[58]

Since he admired common sense in great men, Emerson frequently singled out the practical things which he felt natural genius, made applicable by common sense,

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[56] Journals, III, 253, 250.

[57] Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 404, 418.

[58] Emerson, "Poetry and Imagination," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 9.

had accomplished. He admired public men who used their common sense to exert a good influence. Wendell Phillips, he said, was a Pericles when speaking. In like manner, the Adamses had shown hereditary skill in public affairs and Samuel Hoar had shown himself to be a good lawyer.[59]

Sometimes, Emerson saw direct parallels between European men who had used their common sense and those outstanding persons in America who had done likewise. In one instance, he cited the parallel between Hippocrates of Greece and Dr. Benjamin Rush of America by noting that Hippocrates "knew how to stay the devouring plague which ravaged Athens in his time," and Rush, "in Philadelphia, carried that city heroically through the yellow fever of the year 1793."[60] Where the practical accomplishments of the Europeans and Americans occurred at approximately the same time and in the same field, Emerson often mentioned the great men simultaneously. He praised both Watt and Fulton, for example, for realizing that power was not "the devil," but was a gift from God, of which man must avail himself and not waste. Then, with America in mind as he thought of practical great Europeans,

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[59] Journals, X, pp. 370-71.

[60] Emerson, "Success," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, pp. 269-70.

Emerson concluded that, although it would not be safe to say when a captain like Bonaparte or a navigator like Bowditch would be born in Boston, it was reasonable to predict that, out of a large American population, the possibility of producing similar great men was good.[61]

Although Emerson generally expected to find admirable characteristics and qualities in great men, he did indicate that many of the men whom he classified as being outstanding had bad traits. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, for example, Emerson became especially harsh in his criticism of Daniel Webster and continued his way of coupling comments on Americans with comments on Europeans. In writing about the law, for example, he noted that if one had a "nice question of right and wrong" he would not go with it to Louis Napoleon or to a "political hack" for such a person would not be "esteemed favorable to delicate moral perception." The question of American slavery, he said, afforded no exception to the rule.[62] Thus, one would not go to

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[61]Emerson, "Fate," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, pp. 22, 37.

[62]Emerson, "Fugitive Slave Law," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 223-24.

Webster, whom he had admired before he supported the Fugitive Slave Law, for "Webster represents the American people just as they are, with their vast material interests, materialized intellect, and low morals."[63] Of Webster, he concluded:

> He has gone over in an hour to the party of force and stands now on the precise ground of the Metternichs, the Castlereaghs, and the Polignacs, without the excuse of hereditary bias and of ancient name and title which they had. . . . I admire Kossuth, after his experience of Görgry, not to trust Webster. He would in Austria truckle to the Czar, as he does in America to the Carolinas; and hunt the Hungarians from the Sultan as he does the fugitives of Virginia from Massachusetts.[64]

Even as late as 1870, Emerson still thought comparatively in indicating faults of great men. He wrote in that year that there was much which disgusted him in European biography. The German, Hegel, for example, who had been "sincerely and scientifically exploring the laws of thought" had yielded to pressure and heeded a call to please the king. Fortunately, great men in America did not do this since they were not subjected to the same monarchical pressures as the Europeans.[65]

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[63] Journals, VIII, 216.

[64] Ibid., pp. 184-85.

[65] Ibid., X, 337.

Another vital quality of outstanding persons, Emerson believed, was that they understood poor men, had a sympathetic feeling for humanity in general, and appealed to all classes. As early as 1834, in thinking of great men in both Europe and America, he wrote that "the greatest men have been the most thoughtful for the humblest." Men like Washington, Franklin, Fox, and Alfred had shown an interest in humanity itself by paying attention to the obscure members of society.[66] Rousseau and Voltaire had spoken out for the people in protest against the corruptions and tyrannies of monarchy and had been dominated by a wisdom of humanity somewhat similar to that which made Franklin popularize.[67] In similar manner, the American Theodore Parker, like the Italian Savonarola, had been a scholar who was the tribune of the people and who defended "every cause of humanity with and for the humblest of mankind."[68]

Such characteristics, Emerson believed, gave men a catholic genius which won the allegiance of all classes,

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[66] Journals, III, 333.

[67] Ibid., IV, 93.

[68] Emerson, "Life and Letters in New England," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 324.

until even "the very dogs" believed in them.

> We have had such examples in this country in Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and the seamans preacher, Father Taylor; in England, Charles James Fox; in Scotland, Robert Burns; and in France, though it is less intelligible to us, Voltaire. Abraham Lincoln is perhaps the most remarkable example of this class that we have seen,--a man who was at home and welcome with the humblest. . . .[69]

Part of the reason for Emerson's belief that great men must be concerned for the humble lay in the fact that he, perhaps reflecting a reaction to his own modest economic circumstances, believed that poor men themselves could possess greatness. After publishing Representative Men, in 1849, Emerson wrote that he had had many afterthoughts. One of the most important was that "justice . . . should have been done to the unexpressed greatness of the common farmer and laborer.[70] During the Civil War, he again expressed the same idea in arguing that a man had to draw his power directly from nature, whether a farmer, a miller, or a smith, or an Archimedes, a Thoreau, or an Agassiz.[71] As an old man, in 1870, Emerson did point to the greatness of ordinary people. It was then, for example, that he

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[69]Emerson, "Greatness," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 301.

[70]Journals, VIII, 71.

[71]Ibid., IX, 400.

wrote that "the delicate lines of character in Aunt Mary, Rahel, Margaret Fuller, Sarah A. Ripley, need good metaphysic, better than Hegel's to read and delineate."[72]

Throughout the period of his career under consideration, from the 1830's to the 1870's, Emerson compared great men in America and Europe and found them to possess, for the most part, admirable qualities which set them in a position above and representative of the rest of humanity. The most important service which they had rendered to society and had contributed to history, he concluded, lay in their speaking to mankind and teaching others. This, he said, was the "moral of biography."[73] Therefore, when one encountered a great man, he ought not to have had a feeling of poverty, but should have treated him as a "travelling geologist who passes through our estate and shows us good slate, or limestone, or anthracite in our brush pasture."[74] This continuing comparison of great Americans and Europeans revealed

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[72] Ibid., X, 318.

[73] Emerson, "Uses of Great Men," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, pp. 16-17.

[74] Emerson, "Experience," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 80.

within Emerson's mind his cultural cosmopolitanism as opposed to the strict cultural nationalism of many of his contemporaries. Herein lay a theme which Cushing Strout might well have treated in his The American Image of the Old World.

CHAPTER III

THE IDENTIFYING TRAITS OF RACES AND NATIONALITIES

In 1847, Emerson wrote in his journals that "the systems of blood and culture which we call France, Spain, Piedmont, etc., must not be set down as nothing," for in France, to cite an example, there was a "man" who was "the result of race, climate, mountain, sea, occupation, and institutions," who was "the Frenchman," and who appeared well enough to one who had the opportunity of conversing with many of the best individuals of that nation. In like manner, there was "a Spaniard, an Englishman, a Roman, and the rest."[1] Therefore, as Emerson was still saying in 1860, when one thought of the achievements of peoples, he spoke of the English or the French or the Germans, with their own peculiar abilities "planting

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[1] Journals, VII, 240.

themselves," for example, "on every shore" or monopolizing the commerce of the world. Indeed, we Americans mentioned fondly the "nervous and victorious habit of our own branch of the family."[2]

These "systems of blood and culture" which constituted the genius of a nation and even characterized the society, however, would not be recognizable in any single individual in the country. The English, to cite an illustration, were strong, punctual, practical, and well-spoken, but when one looked in the Parliament, in the playhouse, at dinner tables, and in other places for a person who perfectly represented the type, he did not find him. Similarly, if one searched in France, Spain, and Germany for a Frenchman, a Spaniard, or a German, he would not find him; and in America, he added, the situation was "even worse."[3]

Recognizing, then, the existence of traits which were cited as being characteristic of specific races and nationalities, Emerson throughout his life observed and

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[2]Emerson, "Fate," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 21.

[3]Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 219.

studied the characteristics of European races and nationalities and made frequent comparisons with the traits he noted in Americans. When he cited specific contrasts and similarities, he nearly always referred to the English, but he did consider the peculiarities of peoples in the rest of Europe and sometimes directly compared them to those of the Americans.

One of the traits which Emerson observed and most admired in the Englishmen and which he detected in their accomplishments as he viewed them on his trips to England in 1833, in 1847-48, and in the 1870's was an "excess" of virility. This was derived, he believed, from their aboriginal savage forces.[4] Their strong will, manlikeness, vigorous health, and constitutional energy had come from their "atrocious ancestors," the Briton, the Saxon, the Northman, and the Bereserkir. Thus, if these traits degenerated, the English should again be grafted from the wild stock.[5] In his day, however, they still retained many of the savage features. As he said:

> If in every efficient man there is first a fine animal, in the English race it is of the best breed, a wealthy, juicy, broadchested creature, steeped in

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[4]Emerson, Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 70.

[5]Journals, III, 562.

> ale and good cheer and a little overloaded by flesh. Men of animal nature rely, like animals, on their instincts. The Englishman associates well with dogs and horses.[6]

Thinking of America, he pled, "Now, let us have only the aboriginal features."[7]

The importance of the virile aboriginal characteristics to Emerson was that they had provided the stamina and will with which the English had achieved their flowering period. He suggested that in the creation of the English culture, Nature had held counsel with herself and said:

> My Romans are gone. To build my new empire, I will choose a rude race, all masculine, with brutish strength. I will not grudge a competition of the roughest males. Let buffalo gore buffalo, and the pasture to the strongest! For I have work that requires the best will and sinew. Sharp and temperate northern breezes shall blow, to keep that will alive and alert. The sea shall disjoin the people from others and knit them to a fierce nationality.[8]

It was out of this savage nature, Emerson said, that eventually there had come an Alfred and a Shakespeare, who were not merely outstanding figures, but who were also representatives of the genius (though not all the characteristics) of all the English people of their ages.

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[6]Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 55.

[7]Journals, VII, 232.

[8]Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 45.

They and the men whom they represented were the ancestors of the Englishmen in the modern world. Could not, Emerson asked, the traits passed down by such a splendid ancestry as this "alone account for the English ascendancy in the modern world?"[9] Furthermore, since the Americans were a continuation of the English in a new setting, he hoped that enough of the savage virility had been passed on to Americans to give them the capacity to achieve a dynamic nationhood. At times, he seemed to fear that somehow the American blood was already lacking in this element. In his journals, for example, he once wrote that in America he grieved "to miss the strong black blood of the English race: ours is a pale diluted stream."[10] Generally, however, Emerson was optimistic and did express confidence that the Americans had the strength required for the flowering of the country. In his thinking on the question of the annexation of Texas, he declared that it was very certain that the strong English race which had by then overrun so much of the continent must also overrun "that tract and Mexico and Oregon, also. . . ."[11]

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[9]Emerson, "The American Scholar," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 100; Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, pp. 50-51.

[10]Journals, VI, 501.

[11]Ibid., pp. 494-95.

Often he noted that the practical common sense of the Americans was a result of their inheritance of the English genius.[12]

If the Americans had inherited a savage strong trait in their blood and if they had the potential of great vigor, certainly, Emerson believed, they did not yet show it in their physique and bearing. One of his first impressions of the English when he arrived in Liverpool, he wrote to Lidian Emerson in November, 1847, was that in all the streets the men were bigger and more solid than the Americans and that they displayed in their motions a determination that could clearly be distinguished from the sauntering gait of the Americans. Beside the mechanics, porters, smiths, and even shopkeepers of England, most Americans would be slight and insignificant figures.[13]

Emerson enumerated many other characteristics of the English which he believed were then lacking to America but which he hoped and believed the Americans would acquire. The traits were inherent in the bloodstream and all that was now needed was for his country to learn the

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[12]Cabot, Memoir, I, 755.

[13]Letters, III, 426-27.

lessons England had taught her, to be herself, and to display them. He saw that the English had a working talent, were practical, and possessed a materialistic tendency. His desire was that America should attain these qualities, too.[14] He observed that the English were slow to speak, but that when they spoke, they said something meaningful. The people in this country were stimulated to talk merely by the weather, but one soon came to the end of all that they knew.[15] Emerson admired the tenacity of the English and noted that it stood in sharp contrast to our facility. The facile American, he said, "sheds his Puritanism when he leaves Cape Cod, runs into all English and French vices with great zest, and is neither Unitarian, nor Calvinist, nor Catholic, nor stands for any known thought or thing."[16] He found that the Americans possessed little of the patience which the English displayed. Our countrymen, he wrote, were eager, solicitous, hungry, rabid, busy-bodied, and so ambitious to convince others of their talent that they too hastily tried to accomplish much.[17] Then, when they failed in

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[14] Journals, VIII, 360, 381.

[15] Ibid., p. 377.

[16] Ibid., VII, 415-16.

[17] Ibid., 286.

their first enterprises, they lost their self-reliance and became timid and desponding whimperers.[18] The English, Emerson ascertained, were courteous and had good manners, but in America those gifts had lost their power.[19] The Englishmen, as compared to the Americans, were cheerful and contented. Young people in America were much more prone to melancholy.[20]

Thinking back on all the characteristics which he had observed in the English, Emerson concluded in a letter to Lidian Emerson on December 16, 1847, that as individuals they possessed such a wealth of traits that if a king died, there would "be a thousand in the street quite fit to succeed him."[21] If Americans would be themselves and display these traits which were inherent in them, then, they, too, could display kingly abilities in a flowering period.

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[18] Ibid., V, 207.

[19] The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Alfred R. Ferguson, et. al. (4 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960-64), IV, 138; Journals, VII, 400.

[20] Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 125.

[21] Letters, III, 451.

As implied above in reference to savage ancestors, Emerson believed that the superior traits of the English were due, in part, to what he sometimes referred to as the composite character of the race. The English, he wrote, were a mixture of so many different tribes that he had to lay aside the choice of one tribe as their "lineal progenitors" and accept their characteristics as being an "anthology of the temperaments of them all."[22] Certain of these temperaments suited the geography of England better than others and had survived just like out of a large number of pear trees only a few thrived in a given type of climate. The uniting of those dispositions which had survived, then, was a fusion of strong qualities which had created the vigorous race known as English, a race which could thrive even better in the geography of England than any of the individual types separately. Nature, Emerson said, loved a mixture. The aboriginal races had the required savage quality for success, but they did not improve until they were grafted to another stock. After being mixed with another stock, however, if they lost too many of their primitive energies, they again had to be grafted from the wild stock.[23]

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[22]Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 54.

[23]Journals, III, 362; Emerson, Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, pp. 23-24.

Thinking of America in terms of the composite nature of the English and in relation to the virtues acquired through the blending of the races, he reacted strongly against the "narrowness" of the Native American Party as it developed. He believed that in this continent the energy of the Irish, the Germans, the Swedes, the Poles, the "Cossacks," the other European groups, as well as the Africans, and even the Polynesians would construct "a new race, a new religion, a new state, and a new literature" which would be just as vigorous as those found in England during its flowering period.[24]

Within this composite nature, however, there was, and must be, one racial strand which was superior to the rest. That was the one derived from the Saxons. Fortunately, Emerson wrote, the English had never quite effaced all the traits of the early Saxons and for this reason they continued to have power even though they were beyond their cultural flowering period. Their brutal strength could still be called upon in time of threat.[25] Likewise, it was the Saxon practical spirit

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[24] Journals, VII, 115.

[25] Ibid., p. 64.

which made the English respond to their geography and become commercial.[26] It was Saxon materialism "exalted into the sphere of intellect," which had made the genius of Shakespeare and Milton. The sincerity and veracity of the English were derived from their Saxon instincts and gave them a national singleness of heart. The representative principle in the English government and even the Protestantism of the people had developed in response to instincts inherited from the Saxons. The Celts, for example, Emerson commented, preferred Catholicism and unity of power.[27] When one considered that all of these traits came from the Saxons and were fused into a single English race, he must conclude, Emerson reasoned, that it was because of their Saxon inheritance that the English were able to produce and survive a Chaucer, a Shakespeare, a Milton, and a Newton.[28] When he looked to America for evidences of Saxon traits, Henry David Thoreau stood out in Emerson's mind. He noted that while Thoreau was the last male descendant of a French ancestor who came to this country and while he exhibited occasional

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[26] Ibid., IV, 158.

[27] Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, pp. 223, 114, 50.

[28] Journals, VIII, 345-46.

traits drawn from this blood, he also had a very strong Saxon genius. Thus, it was not surprising that he had a robust common sense, was armed with stout hands, displayed keen perceptions and a strong will, and possessed an excellent wisdom.[29]

Emerson's hope for all of America was that it would produce Thoreaus (although more practical ones) who would, as a nation, display the Saxon traits which were inherent in their blood. If it would do so, then it would create a cultural flowering period and a civilization superior to that in Europe.

Emerson emphasized the superiority of the Saxon components in the composite race which he advocated for America by proclaiming the inferiority of other European races to the English. The French, in particular, came under strong attack by him. Their traits were so bad, Emerson wrote in 1856, that he supposed all men of English blood in America or Europe had "a secret feeling of joy" that they were not French natives.[30] Upon witnessing

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[29]Emerson, "Thoreau," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 433.

[30]Emerson, "Cockayne," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 142.

their traits as revealed during the Revolutions of 1848, he declared that the French proclamations were so hysterical that he felt that if he "had a barn-yard fowl that wanted a name," he would "call him France. Never was national symbol so comically fit."[31]

The French, Emerson said in agreement with another writer, were "worth nothing but at the first push."[32] In noting their impracticality, he wrote that the "Frenchman invented the ruffle; the Englishman added the shirt."[33] Furthermore, the French, just as the Americans, Adams and Jay, and the Englishmen, Nelson and Wellington, had said, had "no morale."[34] Men of principle were known as such and their actions even in the midst of faction, were indicative of it. Among all the French gentry, however, only one person, Montaigne, had made his personal integrity good during the civil wars in France.[35] Morality and integrity were so lacking among French traits, Emerson said, that the "single fairness" of the English actually struck the French with

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[31] Journals, VIII, 43.

[32] Ibid., V, 522.

[33] Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 84.

[34] Journals, VIII, 249.

[35] Emerson, "The Conservative," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 304.

surprise. The result was that in 1856, among the English, life and personal rights were safe, but with the French, "fraternity," "equality," and "indivisible unity" were "names for assassination."[36] "Would you send," he asked, "a youth to learn Christianity or ethics or heroism in France?" Obviously not, for, in a summary of French moral traits, the "character of the French" consisted "in not having one." Nevertheless, many of them were awaking to alarm when they saw the resulting decay of the Latin nations before the "prodigious Saxon race." Bonaparte, Emerson observed in an association with America, for example, had predicted that the people of the United States with their inherent potential would in twenty-five years be writing the treaties of Europe, and Xavier Raimond had tried to rouse his countrymen to the "fact that they have lost the world."[37]

As Ralph Rusk points out in his introduction to Emerson's letters, Emerson was often obsessed throughout his life with the notion that the French intellect was sick.[38] In 1839, for example, Emerson wrote, after

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[36]Emerson, "Ability," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 82.

[37]Journals, VIII, 433, 521.

[38]Letters, I, xlvi.

reading some of George Sand's works, that she was "herself sick with the sickness of the French intellect."[39] Twenty years later, in 1859, Emerson had not much modified his thinking in this respect. He noted then that the French often wittily described the Englishmen on a steamboat as purposely endeavoring to detach themselves from others in order to stand alone and miserable, while the Frenchmen did very much the opposite. If this was true, Emerson observed, it hardly complimented much the brilliance of the French, for they paid for every bit of this ability with their poor writing. "I cannot tell," he wrote, "whose book I am reading without looking at the cover; you would think all the novels and all the criticism were written by one and the same man."[40]

Emerson observed, in addition, that the French possessed the unfortunate characteristic of being unstable and too changeable. Suppose, he wrote, the English were as "mutable" as the French. If that were true the security of the world which rested on the stability of England would collapse.[41] In 1849, he wrote

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[39] Ibid., III, 235.

[40] Journals, IX, 200.

[41] Emerson, "Character," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 136.

with apparent disgust that the "French change their constitution as often as their shirt."[42] Later, in a work published in 1876, he openly declared: "I like not the French celerity,--a new church and state once a week."[43] Furthermore, he had remarked in 1856, when they destroyed their old regimes, the new ones which they established did not appear to be "marked by any more wisdom or virtue."[44] All a man like Louis Napoleon had to do was to say, "I will give you work," and the people accepted him. Of course, Emerson admitted more fairly, in a comparison with America, many Americans accepted a similar bribe of "roast beef and two dollars a day."[45]

Probably the most severe criticism he ever made of French traits came in his description of their ancestors, the Normans, who invaded England. He wrote that they were

> greedy and ferocious dragoons, sons of greedy and ferocious pirates. They were all alike, they took everything they could carry, they burned, harried, violated, tortured and killed, until everything English was brought to the verge of ruin. . . . these filthy thieves, who showed a far juster conviction

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[42] Journals, VIII, 38.

[43] Emerson, "Montaigne, or the Skeptic," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 168.

[44] Emerson, "Result," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 290.

[45] Journals, VIII, 343.

> of their own merits, by assuming for their types the swine, goat, jackal, leopard, wolf, and snake, which they severally resembled.[46]

In spite of the fact that he usually made disparaging statements about the French, Emerson occasionally, especially when he was in France, could find a few good things to say about them. In 1848 when he was in Paris during the revolution, he noted that the French had a "wonderful street courage," and although unfortunately it was aroused by the "least dislike" or "the smallest unpopularity," it made them brave enough to "take your fire with indifference."[47] Earlier on the same trip, he had observed that the manners of the French were "full of entertainment" and as "spirited, chatty," "coquettish," and "lively" as monkeys. This, although combined with "their inferiority as individuals" made it easy to live with them and to characterize them, in part, as civil, good-tempered, polite, and joyous.[48] As a result, Emerson was moved to write in a letter to his wife, on May 24, 1848, that all winter he had been admiring the English and disparaging the French, but that now he was correcting his prejudice by raising the French many

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[46]Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 84.

[47]Journals, VII, 487.

[48]Ibid., p.. 471.

entire degrees. Even here one should note, however, that he did not raise the French enough degrees to place them above the Saxon English.[49] In the same spring while he was still in Paris, he confided to his diary that he believed that the French had "greatly more influence" in Europe than the English and that it was due to their affinity and talent.[50]

After Emerson returned home, he continued to sometimes point out some good traits which the French possessed. When he thought of their religious traits in comparison to the Americans and the English, he noted that the French did not cant as did they and relinquished "all that industry to them."[51] In addition, he noted in his journals, in 1854, that, regardless of their unfortunate vanity, the French had a commendable self-confidence which stood in contrast to the timidity of the English. As a result, he said, "if a hundred persons were stopped in the streets at London, and as many at Paris, and each individual invited to undertake the government," ninety-nine would accept at Paris. Because of their confidence,

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[49] Letters, IV, p. 76.

[50] Journals, VII, 464.

[51] Emerson, "Religion," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 218.

then, they were willing to do something. The problem lay in the fact that their other traits did not add up to an ability to successfully follow up their willingness.[52]

Generally, then, although Emerson could sometimes find praiseworthy qualities in the French, he severely criticized their traits and presumedly found few which he desired the Americans to adopt. Essentially, as Emerson saw it, French traits were inferior to the characteristics of the English, and, therefore Americans should develop English qualities rather than French ones.

Emerson did not think very highly of the Scotch either. He noted that in comparison to the English they were plainly dressed, had simple manners, were not so clean, and looked drunk even when they were sober.[53] Later, in English Traits, he stated that in Scotland there was a "rapid loss of grandeur of mien and manner; and, among the intellectuals, is the insanity of dialectics."[54]

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[52] Journals, VIII, 460.

[53] Ibid., VII, 394.

[54] Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 55.

In his estimation, the Irish were no better. He observed that in Ireland was the "same climate and soil as in England, but less food, no right relation to the land, practical dependence, small tenantry and an inferior or misplaced race."[55] Later, he wrote that in hard times one would find, whenever he went to an Irish district, "men deteriorated in size and shape, the nose sunk, the gums exposed, with diminished brain and brutal form."[56]

Although Emerson admired the cultured Germans who had many platforms of thought, he found it impossible to find in the people as a whole, during his age, the same genius which he attributed to the English. Many men had thought they would find it hidden in Schelling, then in Fichte or Novalis, then in Olcen, and then in Schleiermacher, but in the end they found these masters only clever men.[57] Others, especially the young Americans, went, Emerson said, to Germany to look for it and could never locate it. They hunted for it in Heidelburg, in Göttingen, in Halle, and in Berlin, but no one knew where it was. They went from Vienna to the frontier,

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 284.

[57] Journals, VII, 151.

but they still could not find it. Finally, very slowly and mournfully, they realized that it had escaped.[58]

Even though they did not measure up, in most respects, to the Saxon English, the Germans did have, Emerson believed throughout his career, many good characteristics. In 1839, he wrote in association with America, for example:

> In that rotten country of Germany it seems as if spontaneous character--fresh outbursts of dear nature--were less rare than in this country called new and free. We are the most timid, crippled old uncles and aunts that ever hobbled along the highway without daring to quit the sidewalk.[59]

Many years later, in a work published in 1876, Emerson still maintained that the Germans were outstanding in some respects. The Germans, he wrote in that year, had "the most ridiculous good faith" on the academic subjects which they studied and were so earnest that they were able "to outsee men of much more talent."[60]

In Emerson's view, the Germans also had an "integrity of mind" which set their science, for example, above all others. As he wrote, in a comparison with

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[58]Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 284.

[59]Journals, V, 203.

[60]Emerson, "Goethe, or the Writer," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 269.

America, in 1856:

> Well in England and in America there is the widest difference of altitude between the culture of their scholars and that of the Germans, and here are in America a group of Germans living with the Organon of Hegel in their hands, which makes the discoveries and thinking of the English and Americans look of a Chinese narrowness, and yet, good easy dunces that we are we never suspect our inferiority.[61]

When Emerson thought of the traits of another European nationality, the Italians, again he usually found very little complimentary to say. He did admit in one work that he admired the characteristics of some of the "iron personalities" of Italy, but in so doing he quickly subtracted from the note of praise by remarking, in connection with America, that he valued their power of achievement a little more because in America there seemed to be "a certain indigence in this respect." "I think there is no more intellectual people than ours," he continued. "They are very apprehensive and curious. But there is a sterility of talent."[62] The Italians also had, Emerson observed, an excessive fondness for "red clothes, peacock flames, and embroidery." "Can it be," he asked when reminded by it of America, "that the

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[61] Journals, IX, [illegible] 22, 30.

[62] Emerson, "The Scholar," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 264.

American forest has refreshed some weeds of old Pictish barbarism just ready to die out,--the love of the scarlet feather, of beads and tinsel?"[63] In addition, Emerson noted that when one visited many of the towns in Italy, he saw so many "beggars and beggar-boatmen, and beggar wacheys" that it was difficult to associate their characteristics with those of the people in the ancient cities when they were founded.[64]

When Emerson thought generally of America in terms of other "races," he found what he had said about the Europeans to be very applicable. In their own habitats, perhaps some of them managed fairly well, but the Germans and Irish had, he wrote, for example, "a great deal of guano" in their destiny. They are "ferried over the Atlantic and carted over America to ditch and drudge, to make corn cheap, and then to lie down prematurely to make a spot of green grass on the prairie."[65]

In conclusion, as Alfred Kazin has pointed out, Emerson saw in the English a brilliantly humanized people

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[63]Emerson, "Culture," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 146.

[64]Journals, III, 68.

[65]Emerson, Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 21.

who possessed an animal strength and a materialism which could be detected in and which had been instrumental in the development of their outstanding achievements.[66] They had achieved a flowering of civilization, and, since the Americans were a continuation of them in a land full of resources, Emerson was convinced that a similar flowering would occur in the United States.[67] In comparison to English characteristics generally, he believed, those of the other races or nationalities were inferior. Therefore, as America filled up with people, and if she created a composite race centered around her superior Saxon and English traits, not only would she cease to be inferior to England, but also she, the child, would advance beyond the present status of her parent.[68] Americans, then, should be proud, for as he wrote, "we know that we are the heir, that not he who is meant to be saved is the Englishman, but we, we are the Englishman, by gravitation, by destiny, and laws of the universe."[69]

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[66]Alfred Kazin and Daniel Aaron, eds., Emerson: A Modern Anthology (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1959), pp. 270-71.

[67]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 419.

[68]Journals, VII, 356.

[69]Ibid., VIII, 317.

CHAPTER IV

THE FAULTS AND MERITS OF INSTITUTIONS

On April 25, 1848, Emerson wrote a letter from London to Margaret Fuller in which he summed up "the institutions he had studied with especial curiosity while in England." Those to which he referred were the Parliament, the British Museum, The Times newspaper, the scientific societies, the clubhouses, the Kew Gardens, Oxford, and "some excellent samples of the best varieties of private society."[1] Later, when writing English Traits, Emerson discussed some of these institutions and made frequent comparisons between them and those he found in America. Indeed, he made similar comparisons throughout his entire career. Considering the fact that he traveled

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[1] Letters, IV, 62.

extensively throughout all of western Europe, perhaps it is noteworthy that he rarely wrote about the institutions in any other countries than England and America.

When he studied the institutions of the English and thought of them in relation to America, Emerson found that the Englishmen were so proud of their society that they disliked the structure in America and would speak directly of it only by forgetting "their philosophy" and remembering "disparaging anecdotes." They failed to admit, he lamented in 1856, that America was the "paradise of the economists" and that trade, the mills, public education, and Chartism were creating a system of institutions in England very similar to that in America.[2] By 1878, toward the end of his career, Emerson's lament had changed only in its firmness. He wrote that year that if Americans found immigrants from England still clinging to English institutions such as the Church, entailed estates, and distrust of popular elections, they would be disappointed. "Let the passion for America," he wrote, "cast out the passion for Europe." If there were those who found American institutions

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[2]Emerson, "Cockayne," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 146.

insipid, or who longed for London and Paris, let them return to those cities.[3]

Constantly, Emerson longed for an American genius who would recognize the comparative value of the institutions which he pointed out in America. Many dull Americans, he said, found much to admire in the Europe of the Middle Ages or in European Calvinism, but were blind to the merits, in comparison, of American banks, caucus, Methodism, and Unitarianism. These, he added in thoughts associated with Europe, rested "on the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy and the temple of Delphi, and are as swiftly passing by."[4] He expressed a similar defensive spirit, in a work published in 1875, when he stated that he would not say "that American institutions have given a new enlargement to an idea of a finished man, but they have added important features to the sketch." As examples, he cited the abolition of slavery, and the success of the Sanitary Commission and of the Freedmen's Bureau.[5]

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[3]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 416-17.

[4]Emerson, "The Poet," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 40.

[5]Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 198.

Emerson believed, as Nicoloff points out in his summary of the cycle of history found in English Traits, that many institutions which had once served a nation splendidly became future encumbrances.[6] Thus, he wrote in 1841 that he had little patience with either Europeans or Americans who accepted the "state and church from the last generation and stand on no argument but possession." In comparison to these, even the Europeans, Burke and Metternich, had not done "full justice to the side of conservatism."[7] These men, Emerson said, in 1837, pinned him down, for they looked backward, and not forward.[8] In so doing, he argued, they fell into institutions "already made," had to accommodate themselves to them to be useful at all, and lost much of their individual integrity and power.[9]

It was evident, then, Emerson believed, that men must often change their old institutions. Brave Europeans like Luther, Knox, and Fox had been willing

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[6]Nicoloff, Emerson on Race and History, p. 49.

[7]Emerson, "Lecture on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 255.

[8]Emerson, "The American Scholar," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 91.

[9]Journals, II, 448.

in past ages to take the necessary steps to help alter outdated institutions in Europe.[10] When the Civil War was over and the prospects for the usefulness of American institutions looked brighter to Emerson, he urged Americans to do likewise. Their popular institutions such as the school, the reading room, the telegraph, the post office, the exchange of the insurance-company, and the immense harvest of economical inventions were products, he believed, of "superficial" wants such as "equality and the boundless liberty of lucrative callings." Thus, the institutions themselves were "superficial" and had helped to foster a self-reliance which was "small, liliputian, [and] full of fuss and bustle . . . ."[11] Those American crusaders "against war, Negro slavery, intemperance, government based on force, usages of trade, court and customhouse oaths," and "the agitators on the system of education, and the loss of property" were the successors of the brave Europeans and would rightfully obtain some reform of the domestic, civil,

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[10]Emerson, "Lecture on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 256.

[11]Emerson, "Art," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 59; Emerson, "The Sovereignty of Ethics," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 198.

literary, and ecclesiastical institutions here.[12] This was good, Emerson said, but Americans must remember not to go as far as the French and establish a "new church and state once a week."[13]

Toward the end of his career, on March 30, 1878, after the Civil War and after the reconstruction, Emerson referred to governmental institutions in Europe and recalled that hitherto government there had "been that of the single person or of the aristocracy." In America, however, men had attempted to resist these "elements." As a result, Europeans asserted that the country would be thrown "into the government not quite of the mobs, but in practice of an inferior class of professional politicians" who used newspapers and caucuses to thrust their "unworthy minority into the place of the old aristocracy" to win the posts of power, and to "give their direction to affairs." This accusation, Emerson believed, was largely unmerited. Thus, he wrote, in defense of American institutions, that our congresses and legislatures

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[12]Emerson, "Lectures on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 256.

[13]Emerson, "Montaigne, or the Skeptic," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 168.

ordained "to the surprise of the people equivocal, interested, and vicious measures."[14] Here Emerson was expressing a faith in institutions which he had questioned prior to the Civil War when slavery existed in America. Now that the war was over and the slaves were freed, however, he chose to affirm more strongly the value of some institutions. In addition, when he compared American democratic institutions to those in nations which had monarchies and aristocracies, he could more confidently conclude that American institutions were best <u>for us</u>. As he said:

> Ours is the country of poor men. Here is practical democracy; here is the human race poured out all over the continent to do itself justice; all mankind in its shirtsleeves; not grimacing like poor rich men in cities, pretending to be rich, but unmistakably taking off its coat to hard work, when labor is sure to pay. . . . Well, the result is, instead of the doleful experience of the European economist, who tells us, "In almost all countries the condition of the great body of the people is poor and miserable," here that same great body has arrived at a sloven plenty. . . .[15]

Emerson, however, was not blind to the faults in the American system. He wrote, for instance, in his essay, "Politics," that citizens of the feudal states

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[14]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," <u>Miscellanies</u>, Vol. VII of <u>Works</u>, p. 401.

[15]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 408.

in Europe were "alarmed at our democratic institutions lapsing into anarchy, and the older and more cautious among ourselves are learning from Europeans to look with some terror at our turbulent freedom." Through them we were being made aware that in our "license of constructing the constitution" and in the "despotism of public opinion" our anchors were being loosed and that if there were any safeguards left, they possibly could be found in "the sanctity of marriage among us" or in "our Calvinism."[16]

When he spoke generally of the European feudal institutions, Emerson referred most often to those in England. Although he did not strongly object to a modified feudal system for the English state, he believed that the one in existence during his age was getting obsolete and glared a little in contrast to the democratic tendencies then present there. Thus, while he recognized that primogeniture, for example, had built "these sumptuous piles" and was a "cardinal rule" of English property and institutions, he stated that "it was well to come ere these were gone."[17] Earlier, in

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[16]Emerson, "Politics," Essays, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 202.

[17]Emerson, "Aristocracy," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 166.

1844, he had said that the English feudal system was an "invasion of the sentiment of justice and the native rights of men." Therefore, "let us live in America, too thankful for our want of feudal institutions."[18]

At the head of the European feudal system was the monarch. When Emerson wrote about European monarchy and monarchists in 1834, he admitted that frequently the American republicans libeled the monarchist of Europe because he had been pervaded by an idea in which he intellectually and affectionately viewed the king as the state and by which, as a result, the worst of the monarchs had demeaned themselves "more or less faithfully as a state." A crown, however, he admitted realistically and without derision, "is by no means a 'stripe of velvet with jewels' nor is Louis XVI Mr. Louis Capet, as we chose to affirm." There was, then, some realism in the catch-titles such as Elizabeth of England, Mary of Scotland, or Anne of Austria.[19] In his contemporary world, however, Emerson noted that the title of king had been robbed of all its romance by "the multiplication of monarchs known by telegraph and daily news from all

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[18]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 370.

[19]Journals, III, 405.

countries to the daily paper, and by the effect of freer institutions in England and America.[20] In 1848, when the citizens of many of the European nations were striving to throw off the bonds of existing institutions, Emerson thought of the first French Revolution and recalled that the abolition of kingship or monarchy did not necessarily mean the end of tyranny. The old revolution, he said, had attracted all the "liberality, virtue, hope and poetry in Europe," for by means of it, tyranny, inequality, and poverty were to be ended. The result, however, was far removed from the hope, for was tyranny ended? "Alas! no," he responded, "tyranny, inequality, poverty stood as fast and fierce as ever." Then, with thoughts of America in relation to this, he added that Americans now were putting faith in democracy, in the republican principle, and in the will of majorities, but one day they would learn that some tyranny exists in any system.[21] Generally, then, Emerson said, "I neither think our democratic institutions dangerous to the citizen, nor, on the other hand, do I think them better than those which

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[20] Emerson, "Aristocracy," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 44.

[21] Ibid., pp. 38-39.

preceded them. They are not better but only better for us."[22]

Directly underneath the king, in the European monarchial social systems, lay the aristocracy. When Emerson observed the aristocracy in England, he noted that it had many beauties which commended it to the study of the traveling Americans. He commented, however, that while the English were not sensible to the restraints of aristocracy, the average American would seriously resent them because they degraded life for the underprivileged classes. Personally, however, as he wrote as early as 1834, he believed that aristocracy was a good sign and that in every community where there had been anything good or any society worth associating with, there had been an aristocracy. Therefore, it would be a great calamity to have it abolished, as the French had tried to do during their first revolution.[23] In 1856, Emerson was still expressing the same view when he wrote that, had this class rendered no service, it would have perished long ago and that its institution was one step in the progress of society.[24] As one example of its use, he

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[22]Journals, VI, 11.

[23]Ibid., I, 311.

[24]Emerson, "Aristocracy," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 178.

cited, in 1860, the fact that the wealth which was secured in a few select families was used in Europe to buy and preserve works of artistic value and to lay them open to the public. In America, however, where democratic institutions divided every estate into small portions, such seldom occurred.[25]

Emerson's response to those who claimed that America had been successful without an aristocracy was that we did indeed have an aristocracy. Not only was there one of talent and virtue as nature ordained in most societies, but also there was a selfish haughty one here in America just like there was in Europe. When the Quarterly Review projected its opinion that there was no selfish aristocracy in America and that every man shook "hands heartily with every other man, and the chancellor says, 'My brother, the grocer,'" Emerson said that he earnestly wished that it could be proved that no "distinctions created by a contemptible pride existed here," but he feared that Americans did not deserve the praise the Review gave them.[26]

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[25]Emerson, "Wealth," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 98.

[26]Journals, III, 509.

When he was in England, Emerson visited the Houses of Parliament and recorded his observation about these institutions. He was very much surprised to discover that the usual attendance in the House of Lords was very small. Out of five hundred and seventy-three peers, he noted, only twenty or thirty were present on ordinary days. The tone of his writing took on a bit of irony when he recalled that the existence of the House of Peers as a branch of government entitled the members to fill half the cabinet and that their "weight of property and station" gave them a "virtual nomination of the other half," while they had "their share in the subordinate offices as a school of tyranny."[27] After visiting the House of Commons, however, he was moved to write that "the Houses of Parliament [are] a magnificent document of English power and of their intention to make it last." Thinking of the representatives in the House of Commons, he said: "Stand at the door of the House of Commons, and see the members go in and out, and you will say these men are all men of humanity, of good sense."[28] The main defense for Parliament and all

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[27]Emerson, "Aristocracy," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, pp. 176-77.

[28]Journals, VII, 407.

the existing English institutions, he believed, however, was that in spite of all their admitted defects, rotten boroughs, and monopolies, they worked well and every interest did "by right, or might, or sleight, get represented."[29] On the other hand, this did not mean that everything which transpired in Parliament was of value. Much of what occurred there, as in many "sleepy nations," was mere political routine. Thus, Emerson noted, "England, France, and America read Parliamentary Debates, which no high genius now enlivens; and nobody will read them who trusts his own eye: only those who are deceived by the popular repetition of distinguished names."[30]

In comparison, the American system of representative institutions was, Emerson believed, theoretically more democratic and more humane. In practical application, however, he observed before the Civil War, in a probable reference to the existence of slavery in the United States, the "American people do not yield better or more able men, or more inventions or benefits than the English. Congress is not wiser or better than Parliament."[31]

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[29]Emerson, "The Conservative," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, pp. 292-93.

[30]Emerson, "The Method of Nature," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 197.

[31]Emerson, "Result," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 290.

In 1843, for instance, he went to Washington to spend four days and noted that although one found there "two poles of an enormous political battery galvanic coil on coil, self-increased by series on series of plates from Mexico to Canada and from the sea westward to the Rocky Mountains," he was greatly impressed by "how little, more than how much, man is represented there."[32] In 1862, during the Civil War, Emerson again displayed disappointment with the failure of American institutions. He could not help but remember, he said, that if the Free States had done their duty through their representation in Congress and had blocked slavery, the calamities of his day could have been "forever precluded."[33] What could have been done and what should be done to make American institutions work on the side of justice? In a reference to an example set for Americans in Europe, Emerson said that their system of representation should have borrowed a hint from the Russian requirement that a soldier be shot if he ran away from a battle. "So let our representative know," Emerson wrote, "that if he misrepresents his constituency there is no recovery from social damnation at home."[34]

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[32] Journals, VI, 389-90.

[33] Emerson, "American Civilization," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 283.

[34] Journals, VIII, 101.

In general, after the Civil War years which witnessed the emancipation of the slaves, Emerson lessened his criticism of American political institutions and began, more than ever before, to write that the American governmental system had many recognizable merits which made it superior, for Americans, to the European systems. American institutions, Emerson wrote, for example, in 1878, are all educational, "for responsibility educates fast. The town meeting is, after the high school, a higher school. The legislature, to which every good farmer goes once on trial, is a superior academy."[35]

As might be surmised, although Emerson did not like all he saw in European feudal institutions or even in the native American democratic institutions, he knew of no alternative system which pleased him more than these. His response to European socialiam and its manifestations in the United States, for example, was that, first of all, it was very difficult "to pronounce anything truly of man," for the oracle is dumb "when it comes to saying much about the destinies of "the many."

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[35]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 409-10.

It was true, he said, that it seemed cruel that scholars, for example, should find themselves in "the most awkward relation to loaves of bread." Yet, even though Socialism promised to redeem this distorted balance, he doubted that it would do so.[36] When he looked at the European socialism which he believed had proposed the confiscation of France in 1848, again, he doubted that it would have been successful. He wrote then that "you shall not so arrange property as to remove the motive of industry. If you refuse rent and interest, you make all men idle and immoral. As to the poor, a vast proportion have made themselves so, and in any new arrangement will only prove a burden on the state."[37]

Emerson also raised many questions about the isolated socialistic communities proposed by the Europeans, St. Simon, Fourier, and Owen. He observed that those formed in Massachusetts proposed "to give every member a share in the manual labor, to give an equal reward to labor and to talent, and to unite a liberal culture with education to labor," but he reminded his readers that

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[36] Journals, VII, 428-29.

[37] Ibid., p. 431.

"no society can ever be so large as one man."[38] These philanthropic and religious bodies he wrote around 1860, "do not commonly make their executive officers out of saints." Many of them were made possible only by installing Judas as steward![39]

Throughout his life, when considering the church as an institution of his day in both Europe and America, Emerson remained the critic. In the last volumes which he published, he made the following observation about the institution:

> Romanism in Europe does not represent the real opinion of enlightened men. The Lutheran church does not represent in Germany the opinions of the universities. In England, the gentlemen, the journals, and now at last, churchmen and bishops have fallen away from the Anglican church. And in America, where there are no legal ties to churches, the looseness appears dangerous.[40]

Earlier, in 1856, he had written that the church was much to be pitied. She had nothing left, he believed, but possession. Her false positions had introduced "cant,

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[38]Emerson, "New England Reformers," Essays, Vol. VII of Works, pp. 250-51.

[39]Emerson, "Power," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 67.

[40]Emerson, "Character," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 113.

perjury, simony, and even a lower class of mind and character into the clergy," and her hierarchy was so afraid of science and education, piety, tradition, and theology, that there was nothing left, he concluded, "but to quit a church which is no longer one."[41] Indeed, as early as 1838, shortly after his resignation from the ministry, Emerson lamented the state of the contemporary church. The Puritans in both England and America had found in the "Christ of the Catholic church and in the dogmas inherited from Rome, scope for their austere piety and their longings for civil freedom," but their creed, he noted, was passing away, and none was arising "in its room."[42] The "old faiths which previously had comforted and made nations," he believed, had "spent their force," and had perished away until they were a "speck of whitewash on the wall." Yet, Emerson wrote, it would have been false to say that there was no religion then. To do so would be like saying in rainy weather that there is no sun "when at that moment we are witnessing one of its superlative effects." In America, at

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[41]Emerson, "Religion," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, pp. 219-20.

[42]Emerson, "Address," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 140.

least, there was hope in spite of the fact that men avoided acts and engagements which it was once their religion to assume, for the "avoidance would yield spontaneous forms in their due hour."[43] The problem thus far, in spite of the survival of immortal principles, had been that the inevitable changes which had occurred had been superficial.[44] Not only that, but also the church in both Europe and America had possessed a tendency, as one could see in the use of Greek and European Catholic legends, "to gloze every crime." In America specifically, the church had acted similarly when it had remained silent on slavery and notoriously hostile to the abolitionists before it finally wheeled properly into line for emancipation.[45]

The American church, however, Emerson recalled, had once played a positive and decisive role in our life. The New England church, for example, "in the hey day of its strength had planted and liberated America."[46]

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[43]Emerson, "Worship," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, pp. 199-204.

[44]Emerson, "Character," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, pp. 108-9.

[45]Ibid., p. 114.

[46]Emerson, "Ezra Ripley, D. D.," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 359.

When he sought for methods by which the church might return to a similarly useful role, however, Emerson saw the answer lying chiefly in the realm of individualistic faith, apart from the institution of an established church. All efforts "to project a cultus with new rites and forms," he wrote as early as 1838, "seem to me vain . . . . All attempts to contrive a system are as cold as the new worship introduced by the French to the goodness of Reason."[47]

When Emerson was in Europe, he often visited the churches there and, both then and afterwards, recorded his reactions and made frequent comparisons to the churches in America. In 1838, at the beginning of his career, he wrote that he enjoyed going to a Roman cathedral and that it was "very grateful" to him "to go into an English church and hear the liturgy read."[48] More than a decade later, in his book, English Traits, he described his delight at hearing "the service of the evening prayer read and chanted in the choir" in Yorkminster.[49]

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[47]Emerson, "Address," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 147.

[48]Journals, V, 29-30.

[49]Emerson, "Religion," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 209.

In the same work, he stated that the English church had rendered an effective service by humanizing and educating men and that it and the English people were well matched since the church believed in a "Providence which does not treat with levity a pound sterling."[50] The church in America, he believed, was not too different in this respect, for while it in theory "was there" to check trade, in reality its deacons, ministers, and saints were "steaming with all their sermons and prayers in the direction of trade." If the city said, he wrote, "'Freedom and no tax,' they say so, and hunt up plenty of texts. But if the city says, 'Freedom is a humbug. We prefer a strong government,' the pulpit says the same, and finds a new set of applicable texts."[51]

Emerson also observed that the English accepted their ornamental national church to the extent that it glazed the eyes, bloated the flesh, gave the voice "a stertorous clang," and clouded the understanding of the receivers.[52] Herein, he believed, lay an illustration

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[50] Ibid., pp. 208, 214.

[51] Journals, VIII, 334.

[52] Emerson, "Religion," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 218.

of the problem with all established religions, whether in England or America. Men were misled into a reliance on their institutions, which "the moment they cease to be the instantaneous creations of the devout sentiment are worthless."[53]

The institutions of the Anglican church and especially the clergy, Emerson noticed, were identified with the aristocracy. "Time and law" had "made the joining and moulding perfect in every part." It could easily be detected in the cathedrals, in the universities, in the national music, and in the popular music.[54] In America, the United States had begun well with no knight, no nobles, and no dominant church, and had permitted eight or ten religions in every large town. Its good beginnings, however, had not continued in good order, for now it had aristocratic tendencies of its own whereby "a pew in a particular church gives an easier entrance to the subscription ball."[55]

The English church and the church in America had

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[53]Emerson, "The Conservative," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 303.

[54]Emerson, "Aristocracy," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 167.

[55]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 41.

in common one other characteristic, Emerson said. In each, religious persons were constantly being driven out of the established church or churches into sects which rose to credit and held the establishment in check. "The English and the Americans," he mused, "cant beyond all other nations."[56]

Emerson was frequently very impressed by the Catholic church and its institutions. In 1847, he observed that the Catholic religion respected masses of men and ages and that, if it "elected," it was by millions, as when it divided the heathens and Christians. This was in contrast, he believed, to the Protestant churches which brought "parishes, families, and at last individual doctrinaires and schismatics . . . into play and notice." In this respect, he concluded, the Catholic church was "ethnical and in every way superior."[57] In 1833, when he was in Europe, he said in a letter to William Emerson that the church buildings everywhere, especially those of the Catholics, impressed him. It was strange, he commented, that the Americans "should not build one temple in this magnificent manner." They

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[56]Emerson, "Religion," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 218.

[57]Journals, VII, 341-42.

would probably continue, however, to build mean churches with pews for a thousand years to come.[58] In La Valetta, Emerson saw many worshippers continually going in churches to say their prayers and could not keep from yielding himself joyfully to the "religious impression of holy texts and fine paintings and . . . soothfast faith." How beautiful it was, he remarked, to have the church always open so that anyone might come in and be soothed by the art treasures inside. Then, wistfully, he added, "I hope they will carve and paint and inscribe the walls of our churches in New England before this century . . . is closed."[59] Ten years later, back in America in Baltimore, Emerson went to a cathedral to hear mass, and apparently the type of structure which he had hoped would be built in New England had been erected in Baltimore; he wrote in a letter to Margaret Fuller that he was very contented to see the chanting priest, the pictured walls, the lighted altar, "surpliced" boys and the swinging censer. It brought all Rome again to mind, he said, and made him on that day detest the Unitarians, Martin Luther and "all the Parliament of Barebones."[60] This did not

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[58] Letters, I, 369-70.

[59] Journals, III, 31-32.

[60] Letters, III, 116.

mean, however, that Emerson was impressed by all the splendor he observed in the Catholic church. When he was in St. Peter's in 1833, where "all Rome and much of England and Germany and France and America was gathered," he found it "hard to recognize in this ceremony the gentle Son of Man who sat upon an ass amidst the rejoicings of his fickle countrymen."[61]

Emerson was also concerned with the institutions and practices within the church in England and America. The rite of baptism, for instance, he wrote, had been "getting late in the world when Selden had said that the priests seemed to him to be baptising their own fingers." The methods of and motives behind missionary conversion pleased him no more. As soon as others, like he, perceived how the English missionaries in India did not wish to enlighten, but merely to Christianize men, then they would see at once how "wide of Christ" was English Christianity.[62] In a similar manner, Emerson delighted in relating how John Smith, when the Society in London pestered him about converting the Indians in

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[61] Journals, III, 82, 88.

[62] Emerson, "Character," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 109.

America, went with a party into the swamps, caught an Indian, and sent him to London telling the Society to convert one themselves.[63] He also believed that it was not expedient to celebrate the Lord's Supper as the church did. He had been led, he said, to the conclusion that "Jesus did not intend to establish an institution for perpetual observance when he ate the Passover with his disciples."[64] The essence of religious faith, he concluded in 1832, and continued to believe, was freedom. Therefore, the institutions of the church should be as "flexible as the wants of men."[65]

Emerson believed that, humanly speaking, school and college could make a big difference between men. Thus, when he was on the continent of Europe and in England, especially, he studied the educational institutions. He learned that of the British universities, Cambridge had the most illustrious names on its list,

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[63]Emerson, "The Comic," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, pp. 158-59.

[64]Emerson, "The Lord's Supper," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 9.

[65]Ibid., p. 26.

but since he had a chance to visit Oxford, he chose to write about that school.[66] It was at Oxford, he observed, that "you may hold what opinion you please" as long as "you hold your tongue."[67]

When he compared Oxford to colleges in America, Emerson was moved to write:

> The number of students and of residents, the dignity of the authorities, the value of the foundations, the history and the architecture, the known sympathy of entire Britain in what is done there, justify a dedication to study in the undergraduate such as cannot easily be in America, where his college is half suspected by the Freshman to be insignificant in the scale beside trade and politics.[68]

Emerson also noted that the losses in the aristocracy of England were repaired from the body of students at Oxford. As a result, many excellent fellowships averaging £200 a year with lodging and diet were granted. If a young American, he remarked, were in like manner "offered a home, a table, the walks, and the library in one of these academical palaces, and a thousand dollars a year, as long as he chose to remain a bachelor, he would dance for joy. Yet, these young [English] men

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[66]Emerson, "Universities," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 191.

[67]Journals, VII, 428.

[68]Emerson, "Universities," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 197.

. . . are impatient of their few checks. . . ."[69]

A comparison of the examination papers at Oxford for the year 1848 revealed, in Emerson's opinion, that while the English competitors had performed victoriously on them, they would be "too severe tasks for the candidates for a Bachelor's degree in Yale or Harvard."[70]

Another striking difference between the English and our gentlemen, Emerson said, lay in their use of the thorough drill in which they learned prosody and to "tread securely through the humanities." There was a great need, he thought, for our people to have their "grammar, gazetteer, and Dibdin not so dusty and cobwebbed."[71] Yet, at the same time, he believed that our colleges could only highly serve us when they aimed not to drill, but to create, for they should set the hearts of their youth on flame.[72] "We are students of words," he complained with others in New England. "We are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come up at last with a bag of wind, a memory

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p. 201.

[71] Journals, VIII, 10-11.

[72] Emerson, "The American Scholar," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 94.

of words, and do not know a thing."[73] Worse than this, however, was the fact that our system was one of despair, for America did not even believe in the power of education.[74] America needed a system which had an object commensurate with the object of life. With that, it would be moral, would teach self-trust, would inspire the youthful man with an interest in himself, would arouse his curiosity touching his own nature, and would acquaint him with the resources of his mind.[75]

When he looked at the curriculum offered in English universities, Emerson could find many offerings which did not fit into the proper object of education, as he saw it. "Their university system," he wrote in 1847, "which makes Greek and Latin alive, galvanizes Greek and Latin and unnecessary mathematics into the creation of a university aristocracy."[76] When he thought of this in relation to America, he was delighted that the New England reformers had fixed an inquisition on our scholastic devotion to the dead languages. He

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[73]Emerson, "New England Reformers," Essays, Vol. III of Works, pp. 244-45.

[74]Ibid., p. 254.

[75]Emerson, "Education," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p.. 134.

[76]Journals, III, 362.

recognized that these languages contained the wonderful remains of genius, but contended that for the average student, they simply were not practical.[77] His condemnation of the role of mathematics in the American system was even stronger. "Mathematics," he said, was "thrust into absurd eminence," was "utterly renounced and forgotten" the moment the student was left to the election of his studies, and was "a painful memory of wasted years and injured constitution" as long as he lived.[78]

The ideal college for Emerson would probably have been an unorganized one which existed naturally around every natural teacher. Late in his life, he commended those "natural colleges" which then flourished in Europe, or which had existed there previously. Among those he named were the gatherings in Athens around Plotinus, in Paris around Abelard, and in Germany around Fichte, Niebuhr, or Goethe.[79] Apparently, these European examples were what Emerson had in mind when, in 1840, he had suggested that Alcott, Parker, Ripley, Hedge,

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[77]Emerson, "New England Reformers," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 245.

[78]Journals, X, 37-38.

[79]Emerson, "Education," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 147.

Bradford, he, and others give, in Concord, lectures or conversations to classes of young persons on those subjects which they studied. If these or three or four men such as these "would associate themselves with us and announce their topics proposing to give instruction perhaps for six months beginning the first of October, do you not see that we have a college built as readily as a mushroom?" he wrote in a letter to Margaret Fuller in that year.[80] If his institution did achieve a formal organization then he should like to use its resources to have men like the Americans Allston, Grenough, Bryant, Irving, Webster, and Alcott on his professional staff. If he had to send abroad, he said with a figurative bow toward Europe, he would ask for Carlyle, Hallam, and Campbell.[81]

Thinking of the entire English educational system, Emerson observed that forty per cent of the English people could not write their names. Then, pointing with pride to New England, the center of American education for the era, he wrote: "One half of one per cent of the Massachusetts people cannot, and these are probably Britons born."[82]

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[80] Letters, II, 323-24.

[81] Journals, V, 203.

[82] Ibid., VII, 530.

When Emerson viewed the economic institutions as embodied in commerce, trade, and industrialism, he again thought of Europe and, in turn, of America. The sequel of trade was bringing many consequences, he noted in 1844. In Europe, there were many good signs in which, for example, the demand for beneficent socialism and the cry of voices for the education of the people indicated that the government had "other offices than those of banker and executioner." The specific cases to which he pointed were "the communism of France, Germany, Switzerland; the Trades Unions, the English League against the Corn Laws; and the whole Industrial Statistics, so called." In America, the historian would see, Emerson believed, that trade "was the principle of Liberty," that it had planted America and destroyed feudalism, that it had made peace and kept peace, and that it would abolish slavery. It was true, he admitted, that trade oppressed the poor and built up a new aristocracy on the ruins of the one it destroyed, but, at the same time, one

should remember that the aristocracy of trade had no permanence.[83]

Industrialism as represented by machinery, manufacturing, and factories, was bad, Emerson believed, for the individual. In a work which was published in 1870, he wrote that "tools" like steam, photographs, balloons, or astronomy had some questionable properties. "Machinery," he argued, "is aggressive. The weaver becomes a web, the machinest a machine. If you do not use the tools, they use you."[84] When he visited England in 1848, his reactions to industry there were varied. In Halifax, he noted that a "Mr. Crossley" employed fifteen hundred workers in his carpet mills and that he provided "a school spaciously built and well furnished for the children." Near Leeds and Bradford, however, he observed some ill effects. There, the sheep were black, begrimed by the smoke, and efforts to keep clothes white were hopeless. He also heard that the sense of duty which the manufacturers had for their workers and displayed in establishing schools and "Mechanics Institutions" was recent.

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[83]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, pp. 357-58.

[84]Emerson, "Work and Days," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, pp. 157-58.

In some cases, he was told, the men in the working class were now being so over-educated that they became dissatisfied with their sweethearts and wives.[85]

In general, Emerson was among the majority of Americans who welcomed the industrialization of the United States. As early as 1837, he remarked that it was to him "a sensible relief" to learn that the destiny of New England was to be the "manufacturing country of America" and that he no longer suffered "in the cold and out of morbid sympathy with the farmer."[86]

Emerson was also greatly impressed by the effects the building of railroads had on a nation. "If this invention had reduced England to a third of its size," he stated, "by bringing people so much nearer, in this country, it has given a new celerity to time, or anticipated by fifty years the planting of tracts of land . . . ."[87] As he wrote in his journals:

> I hear the whistle of the locomotive in the woods. Wherever that music comes it has its sequel. It is the voice of civility in the Nineteenth Century saying, "Here I am." It is interrogative: it is

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[85] Journals, VII, 378-81.

[86] Ibid., IV, 207.

[87] Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 344.

> prophetic: and this Cassandra is believed. Whew! Whew! Whew! How is real estate here in the swamp and wilderness? Ho for Boston! Whew! Whew! Down with that forest on the side of the hill. I want ten thousand chestnut sleepers. I want cedar posts, and hundreds of thousands of feet of boards. Up! My masters of oak and pine! You have waited long enough--a good part of the century in the wind and stupid sky. Ho for axes and saws, and away with me to Boston! Whew! Whew! I will plant a dozen houses on the pasture next moon, and a village anon: and I will sprinkle yonder square mile with white houses like the broken snowbanks that strow it in March.[88]

In English Traits, Emerson wrote that one of the most powerful economic institutions in England was the Bank. "It," he said, "votes an issue of bills, population is stimulated and cities rise; it refuses loans, and emigration empties the country; trade sinks; revolutions break out; kings are dethroned."[89] Emerson was not wholeheartedly behind American economic institutions which had this degree of control over society. He noted, in a possible reference to the participants in the Jacksonian bank and tariff controversies and in apparent disgust, that many Americans did fully approve of such capitalistic institutions and that even those who opposed the existing ones attacked "the great capitalist with the

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[88] Journals, VI, 322.

[89] Emerson, "Wealth," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 156.

aim to make a capitalist of the poor man."[90]

Looking at all of the American economic institutions collectively, Emerson observed, in 1863, that their general success had given us, like the English, a material basis of such extent that "no folly of man can subvert it."[91] It had made the American, he wrote as an old man in 1878, feel the "security that there can be no famine in a country reaching through so many latitudes" and "no want that cannot be supplied" in this land.[92]

The institution which Emerson criticized most consistently throughout his entire career was slavery. Although generally he was thinking solely of American slavery, at times he did react to what had been done in Europe about slavery and apply the examples to his thoughts about the institution in America.

In 1837, he had written that "slavery is an institution for converting men to monkeys;" and in 1844,

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[90]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 366.

[91]Emerson, "Editor's Address," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 326.

[92]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 404-5.

he said that "the institution of slavery seems to its opponent to have but one side, and he feels that none but a stupid or malignant person can hesitate on a view of the facts."[93] Therefore, when England freed the slaves in the West Indies, one is not surprised to find that Emerson exclaimed, "I think the whole transaction reflects infinite honor on the people and Parliament of England."[94] He had words of praise, too, for the men in the Indies who had fought for their rights, and he compared them favorably to both Europeans and Americans. Now, he said, the arrival in the world of such men as "Toussaint, and the Haytian heroes, or of the leaders of their race in Barbados and Jamaica, outweighs in good omen all the English and American humanity. . . . here is man: and if you have man, black or white is an insignificance." In addition, he found very touching the moderation of the Negro masses when they were freed. Instead of living up to the expectations of the American captains who left shore in anticipation of insurrection, the Negroes had spent the hour in their huts and chapels.[95]

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[93] Journals, IV, 200; Emerson, "West India Emancipation," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 132.

[94] Emerson, "West India Emancipation," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 157.

[95] Ibid., pp. 172, 145.

After he had studied emancipation in the Indies, Emerson said: "I have not been able to read a page of it without the most painful comparisons. Whilst I have read of England, I have thought of New England." When he did so, he found himself, he noted, oppressed by the situation in America and unable to understand those who complained about a party of men united in opposition to slavery. "Who makes the abolitionist?" he asked. "The slaveholders. The sentiment of mercy is the natural recoil which the laws of the universe provide to protect mankind from destruction by savage passions."[96]

On December 8, 1862, during the Civil War, Emerson wrote to Carlyle that all bright young American men learned one lesson when they went to war. That was "to hate slavery, teterrima causa." This was good, but unfortunately the issue still was not clear to everyone, for Americans still had to get themselves morally right, of their own accord and it was of "no account what England or France may do."[97] Earlier in the year when the slaves were freed, however, he wrote in elation:

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[96] Ibid., pp. 158-59; Emerson, "Relief of John Brown's Family," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 263.

[97] Emerson, Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, p. 536.

> Liberty is a slow fruit. It comes, like religion, for short periods, and in rare conditions. . . . Such moments of expansion in modern history were the confession of Augsburg, the plantation of America, the English Commonwealth of 1648, the Declaration of American Independence in 1776, the British emancipation of slaves in the West Indies, the passage of the Reform Bill, the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Magnetic Ocean Telegraph, though yet imperfect, the passage of the Homestead Bill in the last Congress, and now, eminently, President Lincoln's Proclamation on the twenty-second of September.[98]

One of the institutions of England which Emerson wrote about, and classified as such, was The Times newspaper. In 1848, he sent his wife, Lidian, several copies of it in a letter from London in order that she might "see what we read everyday, the best newspaper of the world."[99] A few months earlier in a letter to William Emerson, he had noted that The Times "was a pretty fair transcript of England, and a chief product of modern civilization."[100]

When he wrote about The Times in English Traits, he declared that "no power in England" is "more felt, more

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[98]Emerson, "The Emancipation Proclamation," Miscellanies, Vol. XII of Works, p. 293.

[99]Letters, IV, 39.

[100]Ibid., III, 458.

feared, or more obeyed." He remarked, comparatively, that in America we, too, were familiar with the power of newspapers, but here they were in accordance with our political system whereas in England, The Times stood in "antagonism with the feudal institutions."[101]

After the American Civil War, Emerson was still writing about The Times. During the war, he sarcastically observed, The Times had constantly chided the Americans, but now that the Union had achieved victory and English trade was threatened, The Times had suddenly discovered what "temper, valour, constancy, the Union has shown in the War," and what a noble "caser of honor and prosperity lies before her."[102] Then, in a work published in 1870, he associated The Times and the New York Tribune as "daily journals" which printed such sickening details that they had "quite superceded" even the "Pirates Own Book" in the "freshness as well as the horror of their records of crime."[103]

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[101]Emerson, "The Times," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, pp. 247-49.

[102]Journals, X, 78.

[103]Emerson, "Work and Days," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 159.

In conclusion, throughout his career, Emerson constantly observed and wrote about European institutions and made comparisons between them and those in America. He continuously found faults and merits in their respective institutions, but after the Civil War, he generally manifested greater faith in institutions and lessened his criticism of them. Where one existing system was more valuable than the other, American institutions, when properly altered and taken as a whole, were better for Americans. This did not mean, however, that the United States could not learn much from the examples set in Europe, for in England, especially, Americans could find many facets of institutions which were superior to theirs and which they would do well to study and copy.

CHAPTER V

THE NEED FOR REASONABLE REFORM

"What is man born for," Emerson wrote in 1841, "but to be a reformer, a re-maker of what man has made, a renouncer of lies, a restorer of truth and good. . . ."[1] What is man in America made for, he might have continued, but to look to Europe as his teacher of the need for reform. A study of European history would reveal, he might have said, the excruciating slowness with which Europeans had opened their eyes, for example, to the monstrous lie of popery. Their lack of promptness in action and their resultant existence under that "lie" would startle Americans to the "possible depth of their

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[1]Emerson, "Man the Reformer," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 236.

own degradation" and prompt them to pursue more speedily the removal of those evils which might impede their progress.[2] Thus, it became the duty of each individual to call American institutions of society to account, to examine their fitness, and to ask if their "housekeeping" was "sacred and honorable."[3] Many years later, even after the outcome of the Civil War had restored much of his faith in institutions, Emerson was still writing in a similar vein. In 1878, for example, he stated that "it is not possible to extricate yourself from the questions in which your age is involved. Let the good citizen perform the duties put on him here and now," for one could not revert to Europeans like Luther or George Fox or to the American George Washington to combat the "dangers and dragons that beset the U. S. at this time."[4]

When, in 1878, he thought of American reformers who had done so, Emerson noted the vast scope of the reforms for which they called. He observed that many reformers asked Americans to "revise the whole of our social structure, the state, the school, religion,

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[2] Journals, III, 365.

[3] Emerson, "Man the Reformer," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 232.

[4] Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 420.

marriage, trade, science, and explore the foundations in our own nature." According to them, we were "to see that the world not only fitted the former men, but fits us, and to clear ourselves of every usage which has not its roots in our own mind."[5] The inclusion of "all these and all things else" into the areas of needed reform set the contemporary reformers of his day, Emerson said, apart from those in past history. Reformers of the past like the European Lutherans, Jesuits, Quakers, and other groups had in their accusations of society "all respected something." Modern reformers condemned everything. Yet, he asked, so what if some of the objections were extreme and the reformers tended to idealism? That only showed the "extravagance of the abuses" which had "driven the mind into the opposite extreme."[6] Periodicity and reaction to abuses were, he declared, laws of mind which were always in operation. Therefore, bad kings and governors could help us if only they were bad enough. In England, for example, "it was the game laws which had exasperated the farmers to carry the Reform Bill." Similarly, in

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[5] Ibid., p. 236.

[6] Ibid., p. 219.

America "it was what we call plantation manners which drove peaceable forgiving New England to emancipation without phrase."[7]

When Emerson thought of the men who were reformers, he saw many similarities between those in America and their European counterparts. The American reformers of his age, he wrote, were a new class and different from those which had preceded them. Instead of being fiery souls bent on hanging and burning their enemies, they were "gentle souls, with peaceful and even with genial dispositions." In this respect, they were like Robert Owen of England who, though a reformer, had benevolence enough to interpret "with great generosity" the acts of the Holy Alliance and of the conservative Prince Metternich.[8] The men who were reformers, Emerson wrote at another time, had the ability to "feel the poverty at the bottom of all the seeming affluence of the world" and to see through "the thin masquerade." As a result, New England reformers had driven their "steeds" hard in the "violence of living" in order "to forget its

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[7]Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 220.

[8]Emerson, "Life and Letters in New England," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 326.

illusion."[9] These reformers, and others, Emerson said, constituted a great array of martyrs. In America the

> leaders of the crusades against war, Negro slavery, intemperance, government based on force, usages of trade, court and customhouse oaths, and so on to the agitators on the system of education and the laws of property, are the right successors of Luther, Knox, Robinson, Fox, Penn, Wesley, and Whitfield. They have the same noble impulse and the same bigotry.[10]

The presence of bigotry in the reform impulse was one which worried Emerson. Probably with this in mind, he wrote, in 1844, that "every project in the history of reform is good when it is the dictate of a man's genius and constitution, but very dull and suspicious when adopted from another."[11] The problem that this presented, Emerson said, complicated the feelings of allegiance which the philosopher, poet, or religious man might have for the reform movements. These men would naturally wish to cast their votes with the "democrat, for free trade, for wide suffrage, for the abolition of legal cruelties in the penal code," and for giving everyone access to the sources of wealth and power. They

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[9]Emerson, "New England Reformers," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 260.

[10]Emerson, "Lecture on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 256.

[11]Emerson, "New England Reformers," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 242.

could rarely, however, accept "the persons whom the so called popular party" proposed "as representatives of these liberalities" because the persons proposed did not have at heart the ends which gave to the name of democracy its hope and virtue.[12] Therefore, the reform movements or the counter-revolution was still waiting for "its organ and representative, in a loner and a man of truly public and universal aims."[13] Yet, at times Emerson did point to specific individuals whom he regarded as the type of sincere reformer for whom he was seeking and, in so doing, compared Americans to Europeans. He wrote, for example, that Theodore Parker "was our Savonarola . . . and the stout reformer to urge and defend every cause of humanity with and for the humblest of mankind."[14] Probably, however, Emerson did not believe that Parker's prestige was of such national or international scope as to provide the leadership the reform movements needed.

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[12]Emerson, "Politics," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 201.

[13]Emerson, "Napoleon, or the Man of the World," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 243.

[14]Emerson, "Life and Letters in New England," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 324.

Generally speaking, then, although he never was very actively engaged in any specific specialized reform movement other than abolition, Emerson believed that the movements were "on all accounts important" for they not only checked the "special abuses," but they also educated "the conscience and the intellect of the people." How could "such a question as the slave trade," he asked, for example, "be agitated for forty years by all the Christian nations without throwing great light on ethics into the general mind," or how could the temperance question be discussed without becoming "a gymnastic training to the casuistry and conscience of the time."[15] At the same time, he saw certain dangers implicit in American reform movements. He feared, he wrote in 1841, that our young men had got only as far as rejection and not as far as affirmation. Because of this, the whole generation of American reformers were discontented with a tardy rate of growth which contented many European reformers.[16] Then, too, he recognized that all reform movements had the danger that "a new simplicity can be preached with equal emphasis on the simplicity it

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[15]Emerson, "Lecture on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, pp. 256-57.

[16]Journals, VI, 528-29.

preaches." Thus, as soon as we come to "live on the fruit of our gardens," some "audacious upstart" will upbraid us, form a society for preventing the murder of worms, and ask, "with indignation, what right have we to tear our small fellow citizens out of the sod. . . ."[17]

From around his nineteenth birthday on to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, Emerson always opposed slavery and advocated its abolition. Nevertheless, as the editors of his journals indicate and in spite of his progressively more active role in the abolition movement, Emerson considered abolition temperately and revealed this attitude "even during the great conflict, in his proposal to compensate the southerners for their loss."[18]

In his condemnation of the institution of slavery and in his advocacy of abolition, Emerson often thought of the American situation in terms of Europe. In his petition at a Lyceum meeting, in 1845, to get Wendell Phillips to speak on the subject of slavery, he said that, con-

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[17] Journals, V, 212.

[18] Journals, I, 177.

sidering the state of this country at that time, the subject of slavery was one which ought to be heard in all places in New England. His reasoning was that, "as in Europe the partition of Poland was an outrage so flagrant" that all Europeans must be willing to hear "the horrid story" over and over again, so the "iniquity of slavery in this country" was so great that Americans "must consent to be plagued with it from time to time until something is done."[19] In early 1862, before the Emancipation Proclamation, Emerson noted, apparently with bitterness, that Americans in the North were moved by the cause of slavery only with mere sentimental sympathy just like that which had characterized their reaction to so many European causes. Because of this temperament, during the Greek Revolution, they had issued only a qualified declaration of sympathy; in the French strife they had tendered Lafayette only one national ship; and, during the Irish famine, they finally sent out some corn and money to help relieve the situation. Now, on the slavery issue, they did not help much either.[20]

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[19] Journals, VII, 5-6.

[20] Journals, IX, 364-65.

The West India Emancipation was the abolition product of Europe to which Emerson most strongly reacted and to which he most often looked as an object lesson for America. The bill had, on August 1, 1834, freed forever the slaves in the British colony and provided for a short apprenticeship in order to make the transition a smooth one.[21] The entire transaction, Emerson wrote after reviewing its history reflected an "infinite honor on the people and parliament of England."[22] It had given to the Negro a "benefit as sudden as when a thermometer is brought out of the shade into the sun" and had given him "eyes and ears."[23] Indeed, Emerson said, "the event was a moral revolution . . . other revolutions have been the insurrection of the oppressed; this was the repentance of the tyrant."[24] Unfortunately, however, the habit of oppression was not destroyed by the law, for it soon became apparent that the planters "were disposed to use their old privileges and overwork the apprentices."[25]

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[21]Emerson, "West India Emancipation," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 143.

[22]Ibid., p. 157.

[23]Ibid., p. 170.

[24]Ibid., p. 164.

[25]Ibid., p. 147.

Thinking of America in terms of all this, Emerson remarked that while he had "mediated" on "his solitary walks on the magnanimity of the English Bench and Senate, reaching out the benefit of the law to the most helpless citizen in her world," he had found himself "oppressed by other thoughts." Images of poor men, "very ill-clothed, very ignorant . . . poor black men of obscure employment as mariners, cooks, or stewards in ships," had come to haunt him as he recalled that these were freeborn citizens of "our Commonwealth of Massachusetts . . . whom the slave laws of the states of South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana" had arrested and sold as slaves.[26] In a country where this could take place, the conscience of moral men had to awaken. If Americans could but see the whip applied to old slave men, then their sympathy with the poor aggrieved planter would quickly change into anti-slavery feelings parallel to those of the prime minister of England and the King's privy council.[27] Thinking back upon this situation after the Civil War was over, Emerson noted that the aim of the hour had

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[26] Ibid., p. 159.

[27] Ibid., p. 135-36.

been to reconstruct the South, but first the North had been reconstructed by the fact that every democrat who went south and saw slavery in practice came back home a republican.[28]

When he read the requirements of the Fugitive Slave Law, Emerson became furious. He wrote then that he had lived all of his life without suffering any known personal inconvenience from American slavery, and had never felt the check on his free speech and action until "the other day, when Mr. Webster, by his personal influence brought the Fugitive Slave Law on the country."[29] While he still felt that the wrong of slavery would eventually be righted, his impatience burst forth. "These delays," he exclaimed, "you see them in the temper of the times." The national spirit in America, he said, was "drowsy," "pre-occupied with interest," and "deaf to principle." The Anglo-Saxon race was proud, selfish, and believed only in Anglo-Saxons. Then, in a comparison of this delay in abolition to European situations,

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[28]Emerson, "Soldier's Momument, Concord," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 104.

[29]Emerson, "Fugitive Slave Law," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 206.

he added:

> In 1825, Greece found America deaf, Poland found America deaf, Italy and Hungary found her deaf. England maintains trade, not liberty; stands against Greece; against Hungary; against Schleswig Holstein; against the French Republic, whilst it was a republic.[30]

Even those few scholars and literary men who professed to be lovers of liberty and had supported European causes were largely indifferent to the cause of abolition, Emerson said. They were "lovers of liberty in Greece and Rome and the English commonwealth," but they were "lukewarm lovers of the liberty of America in 1854." No longer were the universities "as in Hobbes time, the core of rebellion. . . ."[31]

At this time, in the year of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Emerson wrote that one of the chief obstacles in the path of abolition had been the plea on the part of the North for the preservation of the Union.[32] The plea disgusted Emerson and reminded him of Europe for, as he said, "the most audacious cant of Europe was 'the Holy Alliance'--and of America, 'the extending the area of

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[30] Ibid., pp. 224-25.

[31] Ibid., p. 227.

[32] Ibid., p. 217.

of freedom,' now . . . 'preservation of the Union.'"[33] Besides, he argued, there was no union to preserve anyway, for it was impossible for a citizen of Massachusetts to travel through Kentucky and Alabama and speak his mind.[34] In addition, the lawlessness of certain sections of the country was like that of some European areas. As a result, the "constituted authorities were forced to content themselves with such obedience as they could get." One such region in America was South Carolina. "Turkey has its Algiers and Morocco," he said, "Naples its Calabria, Rome its Fondi, London its Alsatia . . . Bristol County its Slab Bridge." South Carolina, too, "must be set down in that infamous category."[35]

When the chief goal of the abolitionists became legally established with the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September, 1862, Emerson obviously was delighted. "The territory of the Union shines today," he wrote, "with a lustre which every European emigrant can discern from far, a sign of inmost security and

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[33] Journals, VIII, 550.

[34] Journals, VII, 245.

[35] Ibid., p. 14.

permanence."[36] He compared this American proclamation with other "moments of the expansion of liberty" in both Europe and America. History had seen, he said, the confession of Augsburg, the plantation of America, the English Commonwealth of 1648, the Declaration of American Independence in 1776, the British Emancipation of slaves in the West Indies, the passage of the Reform Bill, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and now there had come at last the Emancipation Proclamation in America.[37] Indeed, Emerson's faith in the Union was so restored that he was both disgusted and puzzled that many Europeans should think that it was impossible for the North to coerce eight million people to come under the government and accept the proclamation. "This was an odd thing for and Englishman, a Frenchman, or an Austrian to say," he observed, when one remembered "Europe of the last seventy years" with "the condition of Italy, until 1859--of Poland since 1793, --of France, of French Algiers, --of British Ireland, and British India."[38]

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[36]Emerson, "Emancipation Proclamation," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 299.

[37]Ibid., p. 293.

[38]Ibid., pp. 301-2.

Like many reformers of his day, Emerson frequently considered the question of the need for war. In 1838, he noted that many Americans were asking, as men throughout history had asked, if love could not answer the same end as war and if peace could not be as well as war. In this age, however, he observed, there were thousands of men under arms in the "vast colonial system of the British empire, of Russia, Austria and France" and, at first glance, it appeared that the military establishment would not yield in centuries to the "feeble deprecatory voices of a handful of friends of peace." Yet, if one looked further to the omen of "the universal cry for reform of so many inveterate abuses, with which society rings," then war had "a short day," was "on its last legs," and blood would "cease to flow." When he thought of this in terms of both Europe and America, he was like many other American peace crusaders who, as Merle Curti has pointed out, believed that it was the duty of the United States to lead Europe to cooperating in the peace movement.[39] Thus, he argued

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[39]Merle E. Curti, The American Peace Crusade (Durham: Duke University Press, 1929), p. ii.

that the initiative would not take place in a "feudal Europe" or in an area "where no onward step can be taken without rebellion," but "in this broad America . . . where . . . mankind shall say what shall be." Here it would be decided if there would be war or peace.[40]

To the extent implied above, Emerson looked forward to peace, and probably advocated it, but he was not a pacifist. He believed that war was a method by which needed reforms could sometimes be achieved even though revolutionary war did not always bring the golden age which its advocates had predicted. Evils like slavery coupled with peace were far worse, he wrote, than a war which would burn capitals and slaughter regiments and which would free those held in bondage in the South.[41] War, "when seen in the remote past in the infancy of society appears," Emerson wrote, "a part of the connection of events, and in its place, necessary." The ancient Plutarch, for example, considered the invasion and conquest of the East by Alexander a bright and pleasing page in history, for it united the Greeks, gave them an enlarged

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[40]Emerson, "War," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 188-91, 200.

[41]Emerson, "American Civilization," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 282.

public spirit, and carried the Greek culture to Persia.[42] Other wars were good, Emerson said, in that they forwarded the cause of freedom. With this in mind, when he publicly welcomed the Hungarian freedom fighter, Kossuth, to Concord, he spoke of Concord as a monument of freedom where "brave farmers had opened our Revolution" in the fight for American liberty. Then, in association with Europe, he added:

> But we think that the graves of our heroes around us throb today to a footstep that sounded like their own. . . . And as the shores of Europe and America approach every month and their politics will one day mingle, where the crisis arrives it will find us all instructed before hand in the rights and wrongs of Hungary and parties already to her freedom.[43]

In thinking about the good aspects of the European wars, Emerson noted that, like all wars in which law has little force, they had put every man on trial, had demonstrated the personal merits of all men, and had revealed the man of principle. In the civil wars of France, for instance, the personal integrity of Montaigne had shown him to be "as good at least as a regiment."[44] In

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[42]Emerson, "War," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 181.

[43]Emerson, "Address to Kossuth," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 359-62.

[44]Emerson, "The Conservative," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 304.

addition, the French Revolution had been worthwhile for it had taught men "great lessons." It taught them that "the relaxing of the moral bands of society" would be followed by cruelty, that there "was a limit beyond which the terrors of a standing army . . . could not avail," and that there was a point beyond which the patience and fears "of a downtrodden people could not go."[45] Emerson probably would have been the first to admit, however, that the lessons had not been very well learned by the French themselves. In 1848, he observed that the latest French Revolution, which was socialistic as opposed to our mere political American Revolution, had come as a surprise to everyone except the "simple workmen, porters, shoeblacks," and a few statesmen.[46] The American Civil War, too, he wrote in 1861, was a great teacher, "still opening our eyes wider to some larger consideration."[47]

A consideration of the American Civil War in terms of these French wars and in terms of what it could accomplish by way of the removal of slavery, convinced Emerson that if it "cost ten years of war and ten to

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[45] Journals, III, 448.

[46] Journals, VII, 409.

[47] Journals, IX, 335.

recover the general prosperity, the destruction of slavery is worth so much." Fortunately, however, he observed, it did not take so much time to get well again, for, as the French had shown after each of their wars, "a years labor, a new harvest" could "repair the damage of ten years of war."[48] As a result, Emerson wrote confidently that if America survived the war, it would be the controlling world power of the future.[49] After the war was over he called it "a healthful revolution which had achieved the abolition of slavery and which had given men the heart to undertake a whole new scope of reform.[50]

When thinking about the need for righting the conditions of the poor, he looked to the example Europe had set and concluded that reform movements, especially in the form of revolutions, did not correct the situation. The French Revolution, he wrote, for example, had attracted

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[48] Ibid., 434.

[49] Journals, X, 62.

[50] Emerson, "Resources," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 138; Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, pp. 198-99.

to it all the hopes of the poor, but at its end poverty "stood as fast and fierce as ever." Likewise, Americans put faith in democracy, believing that its republican principles would permit reform movements to press their causes and achieve their goals through suffrage. Emerson anticipated that one day Americans who so lent themselves "to each malignant party" that assailed what was "eminent" would learn that there was a "distinction in the nature of things" which was not removable and that the "offense of superiority in persons" could not be removed.[51]

In spite of the belief that there was a natural aristocracy which could hardly be changed, Emerson did pay close attention to the social condition of the lower classes in America and in Europe and condemned much of what he saw. In June, 1841, he wrote that the "state must consider the poor man and all voices must speak for him. Every child that is born must have a just chance for his bread." Unfortunately, however, young men upon entering life found "the way to lucrative employments blocked with abuses." "The ways of trade," for example,

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[51]Emerson, "Aristocracy," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 38.

had "grown selfish to the borders of theft, and supple to the borders . . . of fraud."[52] Part of the problem lay also, Emerson noted that other reformers had said, with the laws of property which permitted individual men to fence in and monopolize land which providence had given all mankind to use.[53] Emerson himself said that while the rights of all persons were equal "in virtue of their access to reason," their rights in property were very unequal. "One man owns his clothes, and another owns a country."[54]

The effect of these conditions, Emerson stated, was to create a "standing antagonism between the conservative and the democratic classes" and between "those who have made their fortunes and the young and poor who have fortunes to make." The latter, who came from the middle classes as well as from among the poor, desired to "keep open every avenue to the competition of all." The European, Napoleon, Emerson wrote, was the representative

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[52]Emerson, "Man the Reformer," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, pp. 241, 220.

[53]Emerson, "Lecture on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 201.

[54]Emerson, "Politics," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 193.

of this class in France, America, and throughout Europe. He "knew the meaning and value of labor, and threw himself naturally on that side."[55] It was he who had been a "subverter of monopoly and abuse" and who had changed "feudal France" into a "young Ohio or New York."[56] It was true, Emerson admitted, that Napoleon had taken many liberties from the people, but when one thought of Europe and America, it became evident that "the people don't want liberty, --they want bread, and though republicanism would give them more bread after a year or two it would not until then, and they want bread every day." In a later era in France, for example, Louis Napoleon had said, "I will give you work," and the people believed him. Similarly, in America, "we hold out the same bribe, 'roast beef and two dollars a day,'" and, as a result, Americans "will not go for liberty of other people" but for "whatever promises new chances for young men, more money to men."[57]

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[55]Emerson, "Napoleon, or the Man of the World," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, pp. 213-14, 229.

[56]Ibid., pp. 240, 230.

[57]Journals, VIII, 343.

When Emerson looked to England, he found there also conditions with which he could compare the social situation in America. In 1848, he noted, for example, that whenever he got into our first-class cars on the Fitchbury Road and saw working men in their shirt-sleeves taking their seats beside well-dressed gentlemen, he could not help but imagine the astonishment with which this would strike the Englishmen. In this respect, it would not be "fit to tell Englishmen that America is like England," for by comparison America was the paradise of the third class.[58] In this respect, then, in spite of his usual admiration of things English, Emerson placed America on top. Yet it, too, like England, needed to have some of her social conditions ameliorated. The question was how this was to be accomplished.

When Emerson pondered American social conditions in light of reform movements, one of his first responses was to say "let the amelioration . . . proceed from the concession of the rich, not from the grasping of the poor."[59] He found that he was able to agree with the

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[58] Journals, VII, 477.

[59] Emerson, "Man the Reformer," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 241.

European Robert Owen who said, in a slightly different context but with applicable implications, "You may depend on it, there are as tender hearts, and as much good will to serve men, in palaces as in cottages."[60]

Emerson's willing acceptance of this idea was probably due in part to his great distrust of mobs as the actors for reform. "The mob," he wrote, "is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast . . . . its actions are insane."[61] It was also motivated by his belief that "the 'opposition' papers, so called," were on the same side in that they attacked the great capitalist only with the "aim to make a capitalist of the poor man."[62] Indeed, it was almost inevitable that if the "excluded majority" revenged themselves on the "excluding minority" and killed them, a new class would find itself at the top, "as certainly as cream rises in a bowl of milk."[63] In addition, Emerson did not see in

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[60] Journals, VII, 134.

[61] Emerson, "Compensation," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 115.

[62] Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 366.

[63] Emerson, "Manners," Essays, Vol. III of Works, pp. 126-27.

the methods of the European reform movements, such as Chartism, examples which he wanted Americans to emulate. During his visit to Europe, in April, 1848, he noted that the English were then expecting "a Chartist revolution on Monday next."[64] In addition, he observed that if one treated the Chartists civilly, they suspected him and thought he was "going to do them."[65] In a clearer revelation of his feelings toward them, however, Emerson wrote that a man of honor could not join the standard of the Chartists, for they had "been dragged in their ignorance by furious chiefs to the Red Revolution" and are "full of murder." Therefore, against their desire, men of honor were frequently forced to join with the rich. This was bad, Emerson believed, for instead of joining the rich, they should have abhorred both the crimes of the Chartist and the selfishness of the rich and remained neutral until each side, through its excesses, learned to accept "wiser counsels."[66] Then, in thinking of what European Chartism said to America, Emerson observed that

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[64] Journals, VII, 429-30.

[65] Ibid., 381.

[66] Emerson, "Aristocracy," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, pp. 64-65.

in using this technique "England's six points of Chartism" were "still postponed." In America, however, we had granted these points to begin with and by a continuation of this same spirit we, "in the midst of a great revolution," would be able to accomplish peacefully what "elsewhere went by beheadings, of massacre, and reigns of terror." This revolution, he wrote, was "the work of no man, but the effervescence of nature. . . . and not an abolitionist, not an idealist, can say without effrontery, I did it."[67]

On the other side of the coin, however, one must at least note the fact that on a few occasions Emerson argued that the lower classes help themselves. Once he wrote, for example: "Can we not learn the lesson of self-help? Society is full of infirm people, who incessantly summon others to serve them."[68]

In reacting to European communitarians, "Utopian" reformers, Emerson again thought of meanings for America.

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[67] Journals, IX, 571-72.

[68] Emerson, "Man the Reformer," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 234.

He wrote, for example in 1844, that the new movements in the civilized world such as "the communism of France, Germany, and Switzerland, the Trades Unions, the English League against the Corn Laws; and the Industrial Statistics" were all consequences of the revolution in the state of society wrought by trade. So also, he said, were the communities which had sprung up in "this commonwealth."[69] Another time, he noted that these co-operative associations were being tried in both England and America.[70] In most cases they were following, or advancing beyond, the ideas of the Europeans St. Simon, Fourier, and Owen. Three communistic communities following these ideas had already been formed in Massachusetts, he said. They aimed to "give every member a share in the manual labor, to give an equal reward to labor and to talent, and to unite a liberal culture with an education to labor."[71]

Emerson was able to "truly honor" many of the ideas of these socialists and the enthusiasm with which they were urged. The doctrines of Owen, Emerson believed

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[69]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 359.

[70]Emerson, "Life and Letters in New England," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 337.

[71]Emerson, "New England Reformers," Essays, Vol. III of Works, pp. 250-51.

for example, were reasonable and his teachings concerning the doctrine of labor and reward were preached with "the fidelity and devotion of a saint."[72] When Emerson visited Brook Farm, he noted that its founders deserved praise in that "they made what all men try to make--an agreeable place to live in. . . . It was a perpetual picnic. . . ."[73] He observed that for such a "charming Elysium" Fourier had even solved the problem of how to get the dirty work done. "'Nothing so delights the young Caucasian child,'" Fourier had written, "'as dirt.'" Therefore, "'the children from six to eight, organized into companies with flags and uniforms shall do this last function of civilization.'"[74]

In spite of the fact that he admired some of the characteristics of these communities and even considered helping to form one himself, Emerson did not feel that they would be successful. In The Dial, he wrote, in 1842, that the "increasing zeal and numbers of the disciples of Fourier in America and Europe," entitled them to an attention by the rest of society. When one gave them

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[72]Emerson, "Life and Letters in New England," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 327.

[73]Ibid., pp. 342-43.

[74]Ibid., p. 345.

this attention, however, he would discover that "Fourier had skipped no fact but one, namely, life."[75] It was easy, Emerson said, to see what would be the effect of this system if it were developed on any large scale in America. As soon as people got wind of the doctrine of marriage which it advocated, it "would fall at once into the hands of a lawless crew who would flock in troops to so fair a game" and, as a result, all of the dreams of its sincere advocates would disappear, "like the dreams of poetic people on the first outbreak of the Old French Revolution," in a "slime of mire and blood."[76] "Every experiment," he wrote, "that has a sensual and selfish end will fail. The pacific Fourier will be as inefficient as the pernicious Napoleon."[77] When he wrote of the Harvard Shakers in 1842, Emerson noted that their experiment might have "great value in the heart of the country as a model farm," but when he visited them a second time in 1844, he became disgusted with some of their practices.

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[75]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fourierism and the Socialists," The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion, III (July, 1842), 86.

[76]Emerson, "Life and Letters in New England," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 334.

[77]Emerson, "Napoleon, or the Man of the World," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 245.

When he saw their "family worship," he said in association with Europe, that he could "remember nothing but the Spedale dei pazzi at Palermo; this shaking of their hands like the paws of dogs, before them as they shuffled in this dunce-dance seemed the last deliration." Such foolishness would hardly make for a successful experiment.[78] Neither did Emerson have any more faith in Brook Farm. He believed that "Mr. and Mrs. Ripley" were the only ones who had identified themselves with the community and that all the others were experimenters who would stay only if it thrived. It would hardly thrive, however, for most of the members were adventurers who would "shirk work."[79]

What value did these communities have, then, whether in Europe or in America? Their lasting value, Emerson concluded, in 1844, was that they indicated that a revolution was on the way in which the government had to educate the poor man.[80]

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[78] Journals, VI, 262, 523.

[79] Ibid., p. 392.

[80] Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 362.

Emerson also responded in a moderate way to those reformers who advocated women's rights. The role women played in society was, he believed, very important. "What is civilization," he wrote in 1862, but the "power of good women." As he thought of both Europe and America in relation to this, he added that there was no better way to account for "the gulf between the best intercourse of men in old Athens, in London, or in our American capitals" and the lowly existence of lesser societies than by the influence of women in the higher civilizations.[81] The English "heroine," Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson, for example, had enhanced and forwarded her husband's career and, thus, the good of English society, by reflecting "his own glories upon him" to the extent that "all that she was, was him, while he was hers. . . ."[82] Right position of women in the state then was a "sufficient measure of civilization" for woman's proper position, Emerson said rather conservatively, should "place the sexes in right

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[81] Emerson, "Woman," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 340-42.

[82] Ibid., p. 339.

positions of mutual respect" and should breed "courtesy and learning, conversation and wit, in her rough mate . . . ."[83]

When he looked at America in light of this, Emerson believed that the "new claim of woman to a political status" was "itself an honorable testimony" to the civilization which had given "her a civil status new in history." Now that American law permitted woman to control her property, it was inevitable that she should take "the next step to her share in power."[84] Therefore, he said, certainly Americans should let her be better placed "in the laws and in social forms" than she currently was.[85] It was here in America that her future lay, for her advance had begun in Europe and moved to America. It had been initiated by the "deification of woman" by European Catholicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Then, it had moved into a second epoch in France where woman had changed from a rude to a polite character in the age of Louis XIV. Eventually, it had

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[83]Emerson, "Civilization," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 27.

[84]Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 198.

[85]Emerson, "Manners," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 145.

shifted to America during Emerson's age where woman's enlistment in the anti-slavery movements gave her "a feeling of public duty and an added self-respect." Now, Emerson said, there was a new attitude towards women which urged their "rights to education, to avenues of employment, to equal rights of property, to equal rights in marriage, to the exercise of the professions, and of suffrage." Then, he added, in a summary of his personal view, "I do not think it yet appears that women wish this equal share in public affairs."[86]

Emerson practiced "temperance" in regard to the temperance reform movement. Sometimes, however, he responded negatively to it, and as with other reforms, he thought of it in terms of America and Europe. In November, 1834, for example, he asked sarcastically, "Is the question of temperance pledges a question whether we will, in a pestilence go into quarantine?"[87] Several years later he declared that he would not pledge himself

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[86]Emerson, "Woman," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, pp. 345-47, 354.

[87]Journals, III, 370.

"not to drink wine, not to drink ink . . . lest I hanker tomorrow to do these very things by reason of my having tied my hands."[88] After the temperance movement had been successful in some areas, Emerson lamented on his travels that the temperance society had "emptied the bar-room" and made it a "cold place."[89] His criticisms and laments did not mean, however, that Emerson advocated heavy drinking and drunkenness. "Wine," he once wrote, "is properly drunk as a salutation; it is a liquid compliment."[90] A better solution to the entire problem, Emerson wrote, would be to follow the example of the European, Napoleon Bonaparte, who said that he "found vices very good patriots" and that "he got five millions from the love of brandy and he should be glad to know which of the virtues would pay him that much." In America, then, we could also harness our evil agents and "force them to serve against their will the ends of wisdom and virtue" by, for example, taxing "whiskey and rum almost to the point of prohibition."[91]

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[88] Journals, V, 253.

[89] Journals, VI, 260.

[90] Journals, VII, 245.

[91] Emerson, "Civilization," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 34.

Emerson, then, throughout his life responded to many reform movements in America and thought of them in terms of European precedents, conditions, men, and reform activity. If, in his reaction, he appeared to be a moderate who, as Frederic Ives Carpenter has pointed out, "distrusted the [communes], and praised peace and temperance with qualifications, and urged women's rights only to rectify injustices, he did progressively become an enthusiastic abolitionist."[92]

Thinking of all the reform movements collectively, including abolition, and of America in relationship to Europe, Emerson wrote:

> Shall it be said of America, as of Russia, "It was a fine fruit spoiled before it had ripened?" Don't underestimate the wish to make out a presentable cause before foreign nations. We wish to come into the court with clean hands, and, looking at our affair through the eyes of France or England or Germany, through the eyes of liberal foreigners wonderfully helps our common sense to rally.[93]

Finally, one should note that for Emerson the real "soul of reform" did not lie in any of the reform

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[92]Carpenter, Handbook, p. 38.

[93]Journals, IX, 369.

movements as such or in a trust of numbers. Instead, it lay in "reliance on the sentiment" of each individual man who should have a feeling that he is the "strongest when most private and alone."[94] Yet, in the latter part of his life, beginning about the time of the strong thrust of the abolition movement in the 1850's and increasing after the emancipation of the slaves in the early 1860's, Emerson stressed this less and leaned toward a greater pragmatism in his assertions for reform.

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[94]Emerson, "Lecture on the Times," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 263.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLESSING OF A BENEFICIAL GEOGRAPHY

As a young man of twenty, Emerson wrote perceptively that the members of each proud new generation of mankind boasted of their dominion over nature, but forgot that it was the secret powers of nature and their natural environment which had made them all they were.[1] Many years later, in a poem entitled "Nature," he expressed the same idea when he wrote that nature "makes and molds" men into "what they are."[2] Although Emerson also considered man's effect upon nature, generally he continued

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[1] Journals, I, 299.

[2] Emerson, "Nature," Poems, Vol. IX of Works, p. 194.

throughout his life to emphasize nature's control over man. In so doing, he made frequent comparisons between European and American geographies and between the influence which geography had exerted upon European development and its potential influence upon American society.

An illustration of one way in which Emerson associated Europe and America in this respect may be found in his comparison of the inspirational qualities possessed by European regions to those of the Boston area. He observed that many discriminating persons claimed that the European city of Rome was "endowed with the enchanting property of inspiring a longing in men there to live, there to die." As he considered the claim, he noted that the climate of Boston also inspired men, for it stimulated them to become versatile as they adapted to it. Then, in a closer comparison with Europe, he added:

> What Vasari says, three hundred years ago, of the Republican city of Florence might be said of Boston; "that the desire for glory and honor is powerfully generated by the air of that place, in the men of every profession; whereby all who possess are impelled to struggle that they may not remain in the same grade with those whom they perceive to be only men like themselves. . . . We find no less stimulus in our native air. . . . New England is

> a sort of Scotland. 'T hard to say why. Climate is much. . . .[3]

In addition to the inspirational aspects of geographical influences, Emerson also wrote about the supply of natural resources which a beneficial geography should possess. The relationship between these and man should be the same, he said, as the "correspondance that is between thirst in the stomach and water in the spring." The elements of nature offered their services to meet the need of man. The sea, for example, offered its aid "as the key to all lands" in the building of empires if man would but "hold" it. In similar manner, rock, lead, quicksilver, tin, gold, forests of woods, fruits, animals, and many other products of man's geographical environment were his "natural playmates." If man, then, used all of the beneficial aspects of his geography, he could control or be master of that geography.[4]

When he thought of Europe and America in this light, Emerson observed that the victory of Europeans over nature brought to mind such things as the "sword

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[3]Emerson, "Boston," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, pp. 86-88.

[4]Emerson, "Wealth," Conduct of Life, Vol. VII of Works, p. 89.

of Caesar," the "boat of Columbus," and the "telescope of Galileo." These were signs of the advance of civilization and of an increased control by man of his geographical environment. Now, Emerson said, America possessed all wealth. It had put timber, mines, and the sea into the possession of a "people who wield all these wonderful machines, have the secret of steam, of electricity; and have the power and habit of invention." As a result of these gifts from the American geography and of man's reception of them, Americans were rapidly conquering their environment. In the decades of the sixties and seventies, for example, they had used the railroad and telegraph to subdue their "enormous geography" and had made the unsettled regions of the Northwest become lands of promise. Then, when the people had swarmed to the West and had found arid land, "as if to stimulate our energy," gold, silver, and coal were found in the midst of the sterile wasteland. In addition, Americans had proved true the fable from Taurida, in Persia, which said that one could stick an iron tube in any earth which sprang of petroleum, apply a light to its upper end, and thus make it burn for a number of years. A

Taurida had been found in Pennsylvania and Ohio, Emerson wrote, and "if they have not the lamp of Aladdin, they have the Aladdin oil. Resources of America, why one thinks of St. Simon's saying that 'The Golden Age is not behind, but before you.'"[5]

Never before, Emerson concluded, had any country possessed "such a fortune, as men call fortune, as this, in its geography, its history, and in its majestic possibilities."[6] Therefore, the "home of man" was here in America and it was here that a "new order" would emerge.[7]

When Emerson commented on geographic determinism, he rarely mentioned any European country except England. He mentioned the old motherland frequently, however, and associated the blessing which its geography constituted with the even better geographic conditions in America.

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[5]Emerson, "Resources," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, pp. 135-38.

[6]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 412.

[7]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, pp. 369, 372.

In his book, English Traits, published in 1856, Emerson said that the climate and geography of England had been a prize for the best race.[8] Indeed, nature acting through the climate and geography of the land had determined that only a "rude race" with the "best will and sinew" should inhabit it. Then, once it had chosen that race, nature continued acting through climate and geography to keep "that will alive and alert." One of the most important aspects of the geography through which it acted, Emerson said, was the sea. It disjoined the people from others and kindled them to a fierce nationality. It gave them markets on every side. Perhaps it even served as a "galvanic battery" to "distribute acids at one pole and alkalies at the other," for it seemed that England tended to accumulate her liberals in America and her conservatives at London. This meant, Emerson said, that the Scandinavians in the English race had remained at home where they could still hear in "every age the murmurs of their mother, the oceans." As a result of the effect of such a sea as this, Emerson wrote, once the land had gotten a hardy people into it, "they could

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[8] Ibid., p. 76.

not help becoming the sailors and factors of the globe," for from childhood, they dabbled in water, they swam like fishes," and "their playthings were boats."[9] At the same time, the climate of the land itself, acting in conjunction with the sea, had conspired to bring out the best traits in a noble race and to help make them a hard-working people. The result of this, Emerson said, was that in his age the landscape aspect of England's geography, appeared as a garden. "Under an ash-colored sky, the fields" had been "combed and rolled" until they "appeared to have been finished with a pencil instead of a plough." "Nothing," he concluded, was "left as it was made" for all of the beneficial gifts of its geography such as an "arable soil" and a "quarible rock" had been turned to its best use.[10]

Thinking of America with such thoughts as background, Emerson recalled that he had once seen a chart which had been designed to show that the city of Philadelphia lay "in the same thermic belt and by inference in the same belt of empire as the cities of Athens, Rome,

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[9]Emerson, "Land," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, pp. 45, 54, 66.

[10]Ibid., p. 37.

and London." Emerson observed that the idea had been well received by the city of Philadelphia and failed to convince the scholars in other major American cities, but he failed to say specifically whether he was impressed by the chart or not.[11] He did, however, note on his first trip to England, in 1833, that the "botany of England and America" were "alike."[12] Then, in a later writing about the city of Boston and in a probable reference to the concern exhibited for the conditions of workingmen in New England by the mid-nineteenth century decades, he noted that the "power of labor which belongs to the English race fell here into a climate which befriended it."[13] Given his conception that the English could survive only in a climate like that of England and his prior statement that "the American is only the continuation of the English into new conditions, more or less propitious," Emerson probably would have agreed not only that the United States lay in the same thermic belt as England but also that,

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[11] Ibid., p. 43.

[12] Journals, III, 175.

[13] Emerson, "Boston," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 105.

given the even more superior geography of America, America would emerge as a power even greater than England had been in the past.[14]

The geography of the Boston area, like that of England, was, Emerson said, a "maritime country made for trade where there was no rival and no envious lawgiver." Therefore, the sailors and merchants had been able to make the law to suit themselves, and there had emerged an expression "in population, wealth, and all the elements of power" more rapid, Emerson believed, than any before it.[15] In another place in the essay, Emerson pointed out other benefits which the Massachusetts geography gave to the city of Boston. Boston, he said, was built "where it ought to stand." It had a beautiful bay with "its shores trending steadily from the two arms which the capes of Massachusetts stretch out to sea." This, when properly implemented with lighthouses, buoys, and seamarks which it inspired men to place there, made it very

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[14]Emerson, "Land," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 39.

[15]Emerson, "Boston," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 105.

easy for any good boatman to find his way into the port.[16]

Not all the aspects of the geography and climate in New England, however, Emerson believed, were either pleasing or similar to those of the English geography. The winters in Boston, he wrote, for example, were especially severe.[17] By contrast, in England, there was no winter. There were only a few days "such as we have in Massachusetts in November."[18] In spite of his dislike for the cold New England winters Emerson did see advantages in them, for as he wrote: "It is out of the obstacles to be encountered that they make the means of destroying them." The deepest waters of the seas, he said, had caused man to build boats and sails and make a ford of them. The falling snow came and made the environment of the soldier cold, but it had inspired him to lie down, to wrap up in one blanket, and to gain added warmth from the extra blanket "which he did not have to bring in his knapsack."[19] Certainly the civilization which

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[16] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

[17] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[18] Emerson, English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 41.

[19] Emerson, "Resources," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 139.

the New England climate and geography had inspired was one which Emerson admired and which he believed was best for Americans. As he wrote:

> Why should these words, Athenian, Roman, Asia and England, so tingle in the ear? Where the heart is, there the muses, there the gods sojourn, and not in any geography of fame. Massachusetts, Connecticut River, and Boston Bay you think paltry places, and the ear loves the names of foreign and classic topography. But here we are; and if we will but tarry a little, we may come to learn that here is best.[20]

In spite of his praise for the whole of American goegraphy, and especially New England, as compared to the English, Emerson readily admitted that America, in contrast to England, had not yet developed the full potential of her geographical blessings. In English Traits, he recalled that, on his trip to England in 1848, his English friends had asked on the way to Winchester many questions in regard to American geography. The thought occurred to him, he said, that "in America lies nature sleeping, overgrowing" and on it man had not yet made much impression. America was a "great sloven continent" and within its "high alleghany pastures" and within "its sky-skirted praise" there still slept, murmured, and hid "the great mother who had been long since driven away from the trim

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[20]Emerson, "Heroism," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 242.

hedgerows and over-cultivated garden of England." "And in England," he added, "I am quite too sensible of this."[21] When America did awaken, however, she would surpass England. Even the dimensions of America constituted by comparison to England such a "large fraction of the planet" that they could not suggest dwarfish and stunted manners and policy." Instead, everything in America suggested, Emerson believed, "large and prospective action" which meant opportunity, freedom, and power. It was true, he admitted, that we were still "approached with vaporing by people of small home territory, like the English. . . . ," but we should not let this bother us, for ours was "only the gait and bearing of a tall boy, a little too large for his trousers by the side of small boys. They are jealous, quicksighted about their inches."[22] Probably the English would have done better, Emerson believed, to have been as honest with themselves as he had been with himself when he was in England in 1848. At that time, he had been greatly impressed with the geography of England. Yet, he anticipated that, as

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[21] Emerson, "Stonehenge," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 273.

[22] Journals, X, 84.

soon as he returned home, he would

> lapse into the feeling which the geography of America inevitably inspires, that we play the game with immense advantage, that there and not here is the seat and centre of the British race; and that no skill or activity can long compete with the prodigious advantages of that country, in the hands of the same race; and that England, an old and exhausted island must one day be contented, like other parents, to be strong only in her children.[23]

It seemed to Emerson that the greatest of these American geographical advantages for potential development lay in the West. Thinking of its unoccupied land and resources in association with Europe, he wrote in his journal, on April 21, 1841, that "America, and not Europe is the rich man." Then he noted, with approval, that De Tocqueville had observed "the column of our population on our western frontier from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico" advancing seventeen miles every year and concluded that "this gradual and continuous progress of the European race towards the Rocky Mountains has the solemnity of a providential event. . . ."[24]

Beliefs such as this caused Emerson to admire anyone who had the opportunity of traveling in the West

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[23]Emerson, "Stonehenge," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 261.

[24]Journals, V, 53.

and seeing its activity and potential. He wrote, for example, in a letter to Margaret Fuller, while she was traveling in the West in 1843, that he envied her in "this large dose of America. . . . We have all been East too long. Now for the West."[25] When his personal opportunity came to go there on speaking tours, he was reinforced in his faith in the potential of the region.

It was in the latter light that he voiced his happiness about the railroads which by the end of the 1840's were opening up the West. In 1849, he wrote, for instance, that "perhaps one of the most real advantages of railroads, and now of California, to the people of New England will be the knowledge of geography which they diffuse."[26] Such knowledge would teach Americans about the "boundless resources of their own soil." In association with Europe, he added that the railroads not only were bringing the American people closer together, just as they had united the English, but also were showing Americans the natural advantages of the West as well. With the help of the railroad and with the beneficial geography of the West, Emerson said, this "bountiful

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[25] Letters, III, 177.

[26] Journals, VIII, 4.

continent is ours, state on state, and territory on territory to the waves of the Pacific sea. . . ."[27]

Emerson also wrote about the beauty of the topography which he saw in the West. The clouds, the inland mountains, and the "tranquil eternal" meadows had made him, Emerson said, clap his "hands in infantile joy and amazement" before their magnificence. They were like the "sunlight Mecca of the desert" and through a keen observation of them, one could look at the West and easily say, "And what a future it opens!" As for him personally, Emerson wrote: "I am ready to die out of nature and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West."[28]

Emerson believed that the geography of the West, like all geographies, conspired for its own development. In 1849, he observed, for example, that it was very "strange" that, when it came time to build a road across to the Pacific, opportunely the "California soil" was "spangled with a little gold-dust here and there in a

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[27]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, pp. 343-45.

[28]Emerson, "Experience," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 73.

mill-race in a mountain cleft." The gold-dust attracted the people and they instantly proceeded to make the road.[29] The same procedure applied to the entire international scene, Emerson intimated in an association of this with Europe. When commerce became "vastly enlarged" and demanded more gold, California and Australia had exposed the gold it needed. In like manner, when Europe was overpopulated, America and Australia craved to be peopled.[30]

When the geography conspired to attract people, to meet the needs of society, and to help itself, however, it still left the final choices up to the individuals, even though their decisions would be greatly influenced by the geography.[31] The designs and doings of the people who went to California, in 1849, revealed this, Emerson believed. These people had freedom of choice and, unfortunately, did not make wise decisions. Even in granting the option of sometimes making the wrong decisions, however, the geography still watched out for itself, for, in spite of the ill behavior of the rowdies, California

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[29] Journals, VIII, 7.

[30] Emerson, "Work and Days," Society and Solitude," Vol. VII of Works, p. 155.

[31] Emerson, "Illusions," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 307.

did get "peopled and subdued" and endowed with a "real prosperity."[32]

One of the reasons, at first, especially, that Emerson looked so much to the West for the hope of future America was that it was a rural area, not yet taken over by the European industrialism of the cities in the East. It was for this reason, Charles L. Sanford says, that Emerson wrote in the 1830's that "Europe extended to the Alleghanies; America lay beyond."[33] Man had to be able to get out alone into his geographical surroundings, Emerson believed, in order to have characteristics such as freedom and self-reliance developed in him. In the city, it was often difficult to do this, but in the solitudes of the West it would naturally emerge, for here "a man is made a hero by the varied emergencies of his lonely farm." Thus, the land educated the people, prepared them for any emergency, and developed those characteristics which made for prosperity.[34] Among the

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[32]Ibid., pp. 242-43.

[33]Charles L. Sanford, The Quest for Paradise, Europe and the American Moral Imagination (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 177-78.

[34]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 416.

characteristics developed was that of patience. One could hardly escape learning it if he, for example, fished, hunted, or planted, Emerson said, for the delays of the wind and sun, the delays of the seasons, and bad weather all taught man to "time himself with nature" and to acquire "that lifelong patience which belongs to her."[35]

In a more idealistic sense, Emerson observed that the country as opposed to the city, which could be found more readily in the West than in the East, was the "school of reason." The city, he said, delighted in understanding for it was made up of finites or mathematical lines which could be measured. The country, however, possessed no such finites for, with its "endless road," "vast uniform plains," "distant mountains," "infinite vegetation," and lack of distracting objects on the road, the eye was "invited ever to the horizon and the clouds.[36] He who frequented such scenes, especially those in the depth of the forest, would find his visits not to be in vain, for it was here that things "assumed their natural proportions, before distorted by prejudice."[37] In this light, Emerson

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[35]Emerson, "Farming," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 134.

[36]Journals, V, 310.

[37]Journals, I, 354.

wrote in his poem, "Waldeinsamkeit":

> The forest is my loyal friend.
> Like God it useth me.
> . . . . . .
> Cities of mortals woe-begone
> Fantastic care derides,
> But in the serious landscape lone
> Stem benefit abides.[38]

The geography of the West, then, Emerson believed, offered Americans this raw material for the growth of the spirit.

Finally and returning to a more practical view, the country scenes, such as those in the West, should inspire Americans to become good gardeners who would "bring out by art the native but hidden graces of the landscape." Thinking of America in relation to Europe on this aspect, Emerson observed that in Europe the people had created model landscapes on the grounds of their country estates. Americans had not done this, however, because the cities in the East constantly drained the country of the best part of its population, that is, of those who would undertake such landscaping projects. Now with the opening of the West, a chief aspect of geography, the land itself, was available in such abundance that it could be bought cheaply. Given this fact and

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[38]Emerson, "Waldeinsamkeit," Poems, Vol. IX of Works, p. 214.

the potential productivity of the soil, no longer should eastern cities lure the "flower of youth" to them. Instead, they could farm the western lands and develop on them beautiful gardens such as the ones found in Europe.[39]

In view of all these aspects of the geography of the West, Emerson concluded, in the 1840's, that we would "yet have an American genius."[40] In addition, he said in his latter years, with a pride which was ironic considering his earlier criticism of cities, the West would give to the United States such an "immense material prosperity" that one would be able to find "California quartz-mountains dumped down in New York to be repiled architecturally along the shore from Canada to Cuba, and thence westward to California again."[41]

Throughout his life, then, Emerson compared the beneficial geography of America with that which had made

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[39]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 348.

[40]Ibid., p. 349.

[41]Emerson, "Civilization," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 34.

England prosperous and believed that America, given her even more bountiful gifts from nature, would one day surpass the accomplishment of England. "It seems so easy," he wrote in 1844, "for America to inspire and express the most expansive and humane spirit. . . . It is the country of the future."[42] When in 1867 he asked, "Was ever such coincidence of advantages in time and place as in America today?," Emerson was still considering the advantages of America and predicting a glorious future for America.[43]

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[42]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 350.

[43]Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 197.

CHAPTER VII

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LITERARY, ARTISTIC, AND ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSION

Throughout his life, Emerson lamented the scarcity of cultural achievement in America, compared it to the accomplishment of Europe, and deplored our unqualified imitation of European culture. As early as 1837, he observed in an address, "Literary Ethics," that men in Europe and America freely commented on the "historical failure" of America because this country had "not fulfilled what seemed the reasonable expectation of mankind." Men had thought, he said, that when America became free, nature would, in the midst of the continent and the mountains of the West, create a new cultural genius. Instead, however, the greatest merit which America

possessed "in painting, in sculpture, in poetry, in fiction . . . ," seemed "to be a certain grace without grandeur, . . . [in] itself not new but derivative, a vase of fair outline. . . ."[1] A year earlier he had asked, "Why is there no genius of the fine arts in this century?" He observed that in sculpture America had Greenough, "in painting Allston; in poetry, Bryant . . . in architecture--; in fiction Irving, Cooper," but all of these were "feminine" and lacked "character."

The first reason for our failure to produce a cultural genius, he said, was that instead of developing our genius in a new environment, we copied too heavily from Europe, especially from England. Our painting, for example, was an imitation of the "Titianesque" and our poetry patterned its style after that of Pope and Shakespeare. The second reason, he believed, was that the arts in America were not called out by what he termed the "necessity of the people." In Europe, poetry, painting, sculpture, and other arts were advanced in the service of patriotism and religion. Thus, the statue had been created to be worshipped, the poem contained a confession of faith, and a religious faith had caused

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[1]Emerson, "Literary Ethics," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 152.

the construction of the cathedrals. In America, in comparison to Europe, Emerson said, patriotism as expressed in the arts was absent while religion lacked enthusiasm.[2]

In spite of this rather pessimistic criticism of the American arts, Emerson expressed hope and firmly believed that in the future America would excel in cultural expression. He believed, in 1837, that the long American apprenticeship to other lands would soon end. When it did, we would emerge as a cultural leader.[3] Many years later toward the end of his life, however, Emerson implied that our apprenticeship still had not ended. He wrote then that the antagonism between the American middle-class businessmen and the American intellectuals was made even more violent by the fact that, while the businessmen responded to America's wealth in material resources, the intellectuals still copied the traditional culture of Europe.[4]

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[2]Journals, IV, 108-9. See also: Perry Miller, The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1959); and Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1957), pp. 159-92.

[3]Emerson, "The American Scholar," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 83.

[4]Emerson, "A Letter," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 258.

When one looks at the specific fields of aesthetic and intellectual achievement about which Emerson was concerned, one finds that Emerson was not pessimistic, but optimistic. Although our flourishing period in art had not yet arrived, it would, and fairly soon. In an essay, "Art," which was published in 1870, he insisted that while the paintings of the Europeans, Raphael and Titian, "were made to be worshipped," paintings now, especially in America, were used merely for exhibition. "Who knows," he wrote, "what works of art our government has ordered to be made for the capital?" Probably, they would just be creations to please the eyes of those persons who visited the galleries and not works expressing deep feelings of patriotism or religion from which most great works are sprung. In America, Emerson said, religion and patriotism were not then the predominant interests of society, and, thus, their painting, for example, did not flourish. Instead, society directed itself toward creating popular institutions such as the school, the post office, or the insurance company. This was not all bad, however, Emerson observed, for in "as far as they accelerate the end of political

freedom and national education, they are preparing the soil of man for fairer flowers and fruits in another age. For beauty, truth, and goodness are not obsolete; they spring eternal in the breast of man." Then, he added, in his usual association of America with Europe, they are "as indigenous in Massachusetts as in Tuscany or the Isles of Greece."[5]

Emerson believed that whenever real artistic achievement emerged in the United States, Americans would discover that real art and real beauty came from within man's inner self. If one studied Greek and Gothic art from Europe, for example, he would see that "all beauty must be organic; that outside embellishment is deformity."[6] This meant, then, that an artist must have a deep insight into the object which he contemplated if he were going to "exhibit in color" even a presentable imitation of the "momentary eminency" of his subject.[7] In painting a portrait, for example, the artist should chiefly strive to comprehend and reveal the character of his subject

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[5]Emerson, "Art," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 59.

[6]Emerson, "Beauty," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 275.

[7]Emerson, "Art," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 330.

and not the mere physical features. Indeed, he had to recognize that the man sitting for him was "himself only an imperfect picture or likeness of the aspiring original within."[8]

In his writing about this, Emerson expressed himself as a Romantic who held a high regard for the potential moral instructive value of art. He said that if the artist would comprehend the character of his subject, he would reveal a small part of "the universal grace," imperfect though the revelation might be. The object which he painted would be beautiful only in so far as it did reveal this "universal grace."[9] All the great works of art, then, Emerson believed in agreement with the spirit of American Romanticism which set in especially during the period of Jacksonian individualism, had been "attuned to moral nature." Therefore, analogies existed between all the arts, for they were all the expression of one mind "working in many different materials to many temporary ends." Wisdom, to cite an example using both European and American revelations, was painted by Raphael, was sung by Handel, was carved by Phidias, was written

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[8] Ibid., p. 328.

[9] Emerson, "Beauty," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 29.

by Shakespeare, was built by Wren, was sailed by Columbus, was preached by Luther, was armed by Washington, and was mechanized by Watt. In like manner, painting, he wrote in 1870, could be called "silent poetry," and poetry described as "speaking painting."[10]

The universal quality of which Emerson spoke was vividly impressed upon his mind on his trips to Europe. Here, like any other tourist, he was, at times, enthralled by the paintings he viewed. On his first trip in 1833, for example, he said that few pictures pleased him "more than the Vision of St. Romvaldo by Andrea Sacchi in the Vatican." He was particularly moved by the "form" of one of the figures in the picture, for it tended to portray a deep inner perception on the part of the artist.[11] On his second trip to Europe, in 1848, after a visit to the Spanish gallery in the Louvre, he wrote that it was "easy to see that Velasquez and Spagnoletto were painters who understood their business." As he observed other paintings of great masters in the collection, he expressed

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[10]Emerson, "Art," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, pp. 54-55.

[11]Journals, III, 93.

his belief that in them "the art of expression by drawing and color has been perfectly satisfied; that on that side, at least, humanity has obtained a complete transference of its thought into the symbol."[12]

On his trips to Europe, Emerson was also conscious that the great pictures were really not strangers to him. Before he had gone to Europe, he had heard much about the wonders of Italian painting, and had expected to find it characterized by some shocking combination of color and form. Instead, however, he found that great painters left "to novices the gay and fantastic and ostentation," and "pierced directly to the simple and true." To Emerson, this represented a sincerity with which he had not previously in other forms in America. He could identify it with the "plain you and me" that he knew so well and which he had "left at home in so many conversations." In Naples, he had the same experience and was moved to say to himself:

> Thou foolish child, hast thou come out hither, over four thousand miles out of salt water, to find what was perfect to thee at home? That which I fancied I had left in Boston was here in the Vatican, and again at Milan and Paris, and made all travelling ridiculous as a treadmill.[13]

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[12] Journals, VI, 455.

[13] Emerson, "Art," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 336.

The problem during his own day, Emerson said, was that the typical artist in both Europe and America, but especially in America, worked here and there and gradually added more and more until he finished the picture instead of "unfolding the unit of his heart."[14] There was still hope for the future, however, because in nature everything was useful and everything was beautiful. Objects which were now merely economically useful, such as "the railroads . . . the insurance office . . . our law . . . our commerce" then would be raised to a divine use when beauty came. The question was when would it come. It was impossible to say, Emerson observed, for the events preceding its emergence would not be identical to those which had come before its issuing forth in European countries.[15] There is some indication, however, that Emerson believed that already America had seen the beginnings of a trend toward the revelation of universal nature in painting. Writing about the death of the American painter, Allston, in a letter on July 11, 1843, and thinking of both Europe and America, Emerson said

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[14]Emerson, "Nominalist and Realist," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 227.

[15]Ibid., pp. 342-43.

that Allston was the "solitary link, it seemed, between America and Italy," for, from his first masterly strokes onward, "a little sunshine of his own has this man of beauty made in the American forest. . . ."[16]

In his consideration of the subject of architecture, Emerson again thought of America in comparison to Europe, and, although he admired European buildings, complained about our imitation of the European styles, which to him meant a failure on the part of the Americans to express the spirit of their own land. In his 1838 essay, "Self-Reliance," for example, he noted with disgust that "our homes are built with foreign taste; our shelves are garnished with foreign ornaments; our opinions, our tastes, our faculties, lean, and follow the Past and Distant." There was no need for Americans to be copying such "molds" as the Doric or Gothic, he said. If we would but look around us we would see that "beauty, grandeur of thought, and quaint expression" were as near to us as to Europe; and if the architect himself would consider our climate,

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[16] Letters, III, 182.

our soil, and the wants of the people, he would be able to create houses which would satisfy our taste and sentiment.[17] Since we had not yet done this, however, our architecture looked "new and recent," gave the appearance of being the "make-shifts of emigrants," and was "tent-like when compared with the monumental solidity of medieval and primeval remains in Europe and Asia."[18]

On his visits to Europe, Emerson admired many of the structures which he viewed there and compared them to those in America. On his first trip in 1833, he wrote from La Valletta that he enjoyed an advantage in that he was entering Europe at the little end which would permit him to "admire by just degrees from the Maltese architecture up to St. Peter's." After a visit to St. John's church there, he remarked about its nobility, with its marble, mosaic, and pictures gliding and with its eloquent walls. As he did so, he thought of America and expressed his hope that, before the nineteenth century ended, New England would see many granite piles erected and that

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[17]Emerson, "Self-Reliance," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 81.

[18]Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 202.

she would also inscribe and decorate the walls of her churches. He did not desire, however, that the Americans copy the European styles. He requested, instead, that they follow the inspiration given by Europe and create for themselves, in their own conditions, by their own architects, and with their own materials, their distinctive impressive American cathedrals.[19] On the same trip, he observed the furnishings of a restaurant and decided that it was furnished with a "beauty and taste which could not be rivalled in America."[20] Later, in Venice, he thought that the churches of Venice surpassed all the churches he had seen before then. He singled out especially the Chiesa dei Carmeliti and the Chiesa dei Gesuiti.[21] On a visit to Santa Croce, he was so surprised that he wrote that he did not feel that it was a Florentine or even a European church. Instead, it seemed like a church which had been built for the entire human race and which possessed such universal qualities that in it he could feel as much at home as the Grand Duke.[22]

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[19] Journals, III, 30.

[20] Ibid., p. 96.

[21] Ibid., p. 133.

[22] Ibid., pp. 118-19.

While Emerson criticized the architecture in America for its imitativeness, he happily admitted with other Romanticists that all good architecture was a mere imitation of a more perfect, metaphysical idea and, as such, contained a moral didactic value. He often viewed European architecture, then, in this light and compared it to that in America. In another instance on his first trip to Europe, for example, he observed that he had grown so accustomed to thinking of American churches as imitations, poor though they were, that when he got to Europe, he could only view those there as "more splendid and successful imitations." Architecture, like the other arts, he said, existed in the soul.[23] Furthermore, it was in this light that De Staël and Goethe had called architecture "frozen music" and that Coleridge had said that a Gothic church was a "petrified religion."[24]

Again, like other Romanticists, Emerson believed that the inspiration for architectural expression which the soul received largely derived from the beauties of nature. Thus, the architecture which man created not

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[23] Ibid., p. 146.

[24] Emerson, "Discipline," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 49.

only was an imitation of nature's beauty, but that beauty, in turn, was just one embodiment of nature's universal beauty. Even the best architecture, then, was only a poor and fractional embodiment of the universal beauty. Yet, even this could be very impressive and move man. Thinking thus, Emerson wrote, in an essay published in 1865, that one could walk in the woods on a winter afternoon and easily be able to see the origin of the stained glass windows which were used in Gothic cathedrals. The colors in the windows were the same as those which one observed "in the colors of the western sky seen through the bare and crossing branches of the forest."[25] On the other hand, neither could any lover of nature enter the English cathedrals which contained these windows "without feeling that the forest overpowered the mind of the builder. . . ."[26] Herein lay an example for America for, having witnessed how the English had embodied their nature into architecture, Americans, Emerson probably was implying, with their beautiful geographical surroundings should take note and create their own exemplary structures.

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[25]Emerson "History," Essays, Vol. II of Works, p. 25.

[26]Ibid.

In addition to this influence of nature, Emerson noted that nature also in its outward manifestations of such things as climate and weather affected architecture. Because of this, he said, man could not build his houses as he would, but as nature dictated. The shape of one's roof, for example, was "determined by the weight of snow." Other factors such as "gravity, wind, sun, rain, the size of men and animals and such like" also defined the limits within which man had to work.[27] This was not upsetting to Emerson, however, and did not seem to him to contradict his other observations about the soul being embodied in architecture for he apparently agreed with Paul Martin Möller, whom he quoted on the subject. "Möller," he said, "taught that the building which was fitted accurately to answer its end would turn out to be beautiful though beauty had not been intended."[28]

In his mental search for an American whose architecture would express the American soul as well as the architecture of Europe revealed the European spirit, he

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[27]Emerson, "Art," Society and Solitude, Vol. VII of Works, p. 45.

[28]Emerson, "Fate," Conduct of Life, Vol. VI of Works, p. 47.

thought of Horatio Greenough, the American sculptor of "George Washington." Greenough had asked Americans to study the European classical forms of architecture in order to find principles, not forms, which could be applied to a distinctive and functional American architecture. He believed that American industry, for example, provided the material basis for such an adaptation. Emerson observed that Greenough, like he, wanted to redeem this country from its imitation of European forms which did not necessarily express the American spirit. The biggest problem, however, lay in the fact that he did not know if Greenough was enough of an architect "to give a working plan of an edifice." Yet, if he personally had something to build, he would have faith enough in Greenough to, after counseling, let him do the job. If he failed, however, Emerson probably would not have been very upset for, as in the other arts, Americans eventually would be so inspired by their land and by their achievements that they would produce their own architecture.

Of all the modes of cultural and intellectual expression, Emerson probably gave most thought to literature.

In 1834, he wrote in his journals that "literature is the conversion of action into thought for the delight of the intellect. It is the turning into thought what was done without thought." Like other cultural expressions, literature, he believed with the Romantics, aimed at ideal truth, but just as painting was the mere imitation of the universal nature so also was literature only an approximation of ideal truth. "The word," he explained, "can never cover the thing. You don't expect to describe a sunrise."[29] In a work published many years later, in 1875, he was still promoting the expression of a universal ideal truth in literature. Writing, then, about poetry as a form of literature and in a relation of Europe to America, he said that the true test of the success of a poet was his ability to take the circumstances of his own day within individual nations and fuse them into universal symbols. It would be an easy job to take the European Catholic church, European feudal castles, European crusades, or the "antique superstitions" of European writers like Scott and Shakespeare and "repaint" them to apply universally to the modern world, but to be able

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[29] Journals, III, 286.

to point out the same creative forces in the American energies acting in New York, Chicago, or San Francisco and to convert them into universal symbols required a "subtle and commanding thought." Emerson lamented that American life in his day was "slow to find a tongue" in spite of the fact that it stormed about them daily. The test of a poet such as America needed and such as Europe had possessed in the past lay, Emerson believed, in his "power to take the passing day, with its news, its cares, its fears . . . and hold it up to a divine reason, till he sees it to have a purpose and beauty. . . ."[30]

One of the reasons why the United States had not yet found a literary figure to express her activity in universal terms, Emerson contended, was that American writers were too easily satisfied. If they as scholars, were considered as good as the Englishmen or if they had written a book which others read, they desired to do no more. Too easily they accepted the false assumption that all thought had already long ago been adequately set down in European books. Instead of assuming this, Emerson wrote, they should "say rather that all literature

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[30]Emerson, "Poetry and Imagination," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, p. 38.

is yet to be written" for the latter was the "perpetual admonition" with which the American virgin country confronted writers.[31] As he wrote more pointedly in relation to Europe:

> We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence in the mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and complaisant.[32]

In spite of the fact that Emerson lamented America's literary and cultural dependence on Europe, he did not, as Frederic Ives Carpenter relates, attack European literature negatively. Instead, he wrote about its influence on America, sometimes praised it, and declared the new opportunity for independent creative writing and thinking which a new America offered."[33] In one place in English Traits, for example, Emerson merely wrote about the influence of European literature on Americans by observing that "every book we read, every biography, play,

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[31]Emerson, "Literary Ethics," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 161.

[32]Emerson, "The American Scholar," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 113.

[33]Carpenter, Handbook, p. 55.

romance, in whatever form is still English history and manners." Then, he continued by quoting an Englishman who had said that, until the United States granted a copyright law, the English would "have the teaching" of Americans. In no instance here, however, did he either condemn the literature or claim that it possessed specific qualities which would affect Americans adversely.[34]

In discussing specific European writers, Emerson revealed even more clearly the high estimation in which he held the masters of Old World speech and writing. When he thought of Milton, for example, he wrote that "no man can be named whose mind still acts on the cultivated intellect of England and America with an energy comparable to that of Milton." Perhaps, Shakespeare as a poet, surpassed him in his popularity with foreign nations, but Shakespeare, he said, was "a voice merely."[35] "Milton's prose writings," Emerson wrote, "especially the 'Defense of the English People,'" were "remarkable compositions" and were "earnest, spiritual, rich with allusion, sparkling with innumerable ornaments." He did

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[34]Emerson, "Land," English Traits, Vol. V of Works, p. 39.

[35]Emerson, "Milton," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 151.

say, however, in an association of Europe with America, that Milton's prose works were not as effective in gaining practical points as were those of the Englishmen, Swift and Burke, or even as were several masterly speeches which had been made in the American Congress.[36]

Similarly, Emerson wrote about the influence of Shakespeare, did not criticize his works, and thought of him in association with America. He observed in Representative Men, for example, that Shakespeare "wrote the airs for all our modern music," "drew the man of England and Europe," and was "the father of the man in America."[37] Emerson also noted that the works of Shakespeare had created an indirect influence on America when they had acted to call out the genius of the Germans into poetic, scientific, philosophical, and religious achievements. In so doing, they had made Germany the "paramount intellectual influence of the world" which, in turn, had a great influence on America.[38] The writings

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[36] Ibid., pp. 146-47.

[37] Emerson, "Shakespeare, or the Poet," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 201.

[38] Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 180.

were able to accomplish this, in part, Emerson said, because they revealed to a large extent Shakespeare's superior ability to portray character. He was so good at it, Emerson had written as early as 1834, that Scott's acclaimed ability to "take kings and nobles off their stilts" and to give "them simple dignity" was "all turgid as compared with Shakespeare's." In addition, Shakespeare's works portrayed an immortal style of writing which made his plays, for example, as fresh then as when they had been published. "The remarkable sentences of Lear, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth," Emerson wrote, "might as naturally have been composed in 1834 as in 1600." In spite of the relevance of Shakespeare's works for the modern period in both Europe and America, however, Emerson's plea still remained that of a call for Americans to break from the influence of men like Shakespeare and to produce universal immortal works of their own.[39]

The German writer and philosopher, Goethe, also drew a non-critical response and a comparison with American writers from Emerson. To Emerson, he appeared to be the king of all scholars. No set of writings could

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[39]Journals, III, 327.

more safely be put in the hands of Americans, he wrote, then the letters of Goethe for the Americans themselves produced little worth reading.[40] Probably Emerson's admiration for Goethe would have been no less even if America had possessed an outstanding writer. Goethe's ideas had influenced Emerson in his decision to quit the church and in the development of his ideas on self-reliance. It was true that their works embodied adventure, but they did not reveal a talent worthy of appreciation unless they supported some party. Goethe, however, made a "habitual reference to interior truth" in his works and possessed, in response to German demands, a "controlling sincerity."[41]

Among the European romantic writers to whom Emerson responded, one who frequently came to mind was Robert Burns. Burns, Emerson believed, represented the mind of the middle class in their uprisings against the privileged minorities. He expressed the same spirit,

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[40]Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 189. See also: Henry A. Pochmann, German Culture in America (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), pp. 169-70, 195.

[41]Emerson, "Goethe, or the Writer," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, p. 267.

Emerson said in a comparison using both European and American events, as had been revealed in the American and French Revolutions, the Confession of Augsburg, the Declaration of Independence; and the French Rights of Man.[42] Emerson also noted that the "prominence of intellectual power in Bulwer's romances" was providing a "main stimulus to mental culture in thousands of young men in England and America."[43] It was with the advent of another European romantic writer, Wordsworth, however, Emerson wrote, that the whole spirit of literature began to be revolutionized by the utilization of the teachings of nature. This influence soon came to be felt in poetry everywhere in both England and America. The problem was that it had not yet produced its genius in America.[44]

Emerson also responded to the great classical writers and thought of them in association with America. Chief among these was Plato who, Emerson said, was "plain as a Quaker" and had a "Franklin-like wisdom." As

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[42]Emerson, "Robert Burns," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 366.

[43]Emerson, "Europe and European Books," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 232.

[44]Ibid., p. 228.

a result, just as the ideas expressed in the Bible had implanted themselves in the every-day conversation of every person in Europe and America, so also had the writings of Plato come to preoccupy every European and American thinking man. His writings had such universal appeal and were debated so much that, to the reader in New England, he appeared to be an American genius. "His broad humanity," Emerson concluded, "transcends all sectional lines."[45]

Of his contemporary literary and philosophical European figures, Emerson corresponded with Carlyle more than any other. Because Carlyle's work had not yet had time to make its full impact on Americans, however, Emerson determined to say nothing of Carlyle in his work, "Thoughts on Modern Literature." Yet, he did express his belief that the influence of Carlyle on the youth in the United States would be so strong that within a few years Americans would have to acknowledge that his work did have strength.[46] He did not feel, however, that Carlyle was a universal writer or that he would be able

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[45]Emerson, "Plato, or the Philosopher," Representative Men, Vol. IV of Works, pp. 71, 46, 41-43.

[46]Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, p. 189.

to satisfy the questions which Americans asked. To Emerson, generally he was a "very national figure" who could not "bear transplantion" to America.[47]

Apart for his association of individual European literary figures and works with America and American writings, Emerson also thought of them collectively in comparison to American achievements. When doing so, he observed throughout his life that, by comparison, Americans were "puny and fickle," that they were diseased with "hesitation and following," and that their books were "tents, not pyramids."[48] As he wrote in "The Poet" in 1856:

> I look in vain for the poet whom I describe. We do not with sufficient plainness or sufficient profoundness address ourselves to life, nor dare we chaunt our own times and social circumstance. . . . Time and nature yield as many gifts, but not yet the timely man. . . . Dante's praise is that he dared to write his autobiography in colossal cipher, or into universality. We have yet no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times another carnival of the same gods whose pictures he so much admires. Homer, then in the Middle Age; then in Calvinism. . . .[49]

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[47]Emerson, "Carlyle," Letters and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of Works, p. 456.

[48]Journals, V, 529.

[49]Emerson, "The Poet," Essays, Vol. III of Works, p. 40.

In spite of this attitude, however, Emerson did see hope for America in the future for, as he observed, "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres."[50] Therefore, he added later, "he who doubts whether this age or country can yield any contribution to the literature of the world only betrays his own blindness to the necessities of the human soul."[51]

Beginning, then, around 1837 and continuing into the 1860's and 1870's, Emerson constantly complained that American art, literature, and architecture were mere imitations of European forms, especially English ones, and that, as a result, they did not yet constitute the outstanding contributions which could be expected of Americans in these areas. Therefore, he called for an American cultural nationalism. Although Emerson probably would have admitted that Americans of his era were becoming progressively more responsive in native cultural

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[50] Ibid., p. 41.

[51] Emerson, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Natural History of Intellect, Vol. XII of Works, pp. 199-200.

expression, he felt they had not yet achieved praiseworthy results. Until Americans redeemed themselves from imitation of European culture, Emerson said in 1842, and many times thereafter, they would have to be content with having a Europeanized culture. Indeed, he observed somewhat sternly in 1842, there would be no "great Yankee" in achievement until in the unfolding of our population and power, England and other European countries kicked "the beam."[52]

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[52] Journals, VI, 264.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FUTURE OF AMERICA

Beginning very noticeably in the 1830's and continuing to the late 1870's, Ralph Waldo Emerson constantly thought of America in relation to Europe, pleaded with her to cease her mere imitation of European culture, called for her to use the examples of European achievement as an inspiration to develop her own potential, and predicted that if she would do these things, given her natural advantages, she would exceed the European accomplishment and assume the cultural leadership of the future world.

Emerson's thought about America in relation to Europe was shaped by the image or impressions of Europe

he gleaned from his travels there, his associations with trans-Atlantic friends, his reading of European authors, and contemporary opinion about Europe and its people. Like many other Americans of his day, he frequently expressed the idea that old Europe was corrupt. In this respect, he exemplified Cushing Strout's belief that, for Americans, Europe has meant "not so much a specific geographical place as it has a projected contrast in ideas, values, and institutions" to their own new land of opportunity.[1] Thus, Emerson was disappointed to see that many aspects of American culture were mere imitations of European forms and called for his countrymen to shed the corruptness of old Europe and to begin anew. However, unlike strict American cultural nationalists of his day, Emerson did not call for an American cultural nationalism exclusive of Europe. He believed that Europe, especially England, had set many good examples for America to copy. Even in the case of examples which he had no desire for America to imitate, he frequently saw virtue, for Europeans.

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[1]See Cushing Strout, The American Image of the Old World (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), pp. xii-xiii.

Thus, Emerson's was a cosmopolitan mind, not less so at the end than at the beginning of the mid-nineteenth century decades. If there was any narrowness in his impressions of Europe as he related them to the American situation, it lay chiefly in his outspoken favoritism for Saxon traits as opposed to the characteristics of other European nationalities.

Even though the American Civil War and the immediate events leading up to it came in the midst of Emerson's career, they did not much alter the application of his image of Europe to American affairs. There thus was distinct continuity in Emerson's thought from the 1830's through the 1870's. During this period, he rarely talked about America's great men, or about American nationality, institutions, reform movements, geography, art, architecture, or literature except in terms of his impressions of Europe. Similarly, he continued to proclaim his condemnation of American unoriginality in cultural creativity. Just as he exclaimed, on February 7, 1844, that imitation was a "false state of affairs," so, likewise, he insisted, on March 30, 1878, that any wise man would be alarmed at

the "European influences on this country."[2]

The chief exception to this continuity lay in Emerson's acceptance of institutions and reform movements over the decades. One must partially agree with George M. Frederickson that the self-reliant Emerson of the 1830's, an idealist with little faith in institutions and upholder of individual reform, began to express confidence in institutions and combined efforts after the slavery controversy and the Civil War demonstrated to him the need for organization to end slavery and preserve the union.[3] On the other hand, it may be more appropriately argued that, even in this instance, there was a general continuity in Emerson's thinking about Europe and America. There is no one point at which he abruptly changed from a philosophical anti-institutional view to a practical pro-institutional view. Rather, beginning in the late 1830's, he gradually expressed an increasing confidence in institutions and organizations until the results of the Civil War made him believe that such trust was fully

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[2]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 343; Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 415.

[3]See George M. Frederickson, The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 38 ff.

justified. Thereafter, he continued his practical acceptance of institutions.

Although Emerson, throughout, believed that Europe's influence on America was excessive, he predicted that in the future the direction of influence would be reversed. He felt confident that America's material leadership of the world would lead to cultural leadership. As Europe was now shaping America, so America would later shape Europe. This did not indicate, however, that Emerson was not also aware of America's cultural influence on Europe (and, thus, of a two-way European-American cultural interaction) in his own age. Declaring that the initiative in the future would and must be taken by America, he was optimistic and wanted to speed the day. Even in the 1840's as he became increasingly concerned about the impediments slavery created in the progress of the Saxon race on American soil, he wrote that America would give an "aspect of greatness" to the future and that it was "the future home of man."[4] After the Civil War and emancipation, his faith blossomed fully. On

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[4]Emerson, "The Young American," Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Vol. I of Works, p. 369.

July 18, 1867, he proclaimed:

> Brothers, I draw new hope from the atmosphere we breathe today, from the healthy sentiment of the American people, and from the avowed aims and tendencies of the educated class. The age has new convictions. We know that in certain historic periods there have been times of negation--a decay of thought, and a consequent national decline; that in France, at one time, there was almost a repudiation of the moral sentiment in what is called, by distinction, society--not a believer within the church, and almost not a theist out of it. In England the like spiritual disease affected the upper class in the time of Charles II and down into the reign of the Georges. But it honorably distinguishes the educated class here, that they believe in the succor which the heart yields to the intellect, and draw greatness from its inspirations . . . I think their hands are strong enough to hold up the Republic. I read the promise of better times and of greater men.[5]

Writing on "The Fortune of the Republic" a decade later, Emerson would conclude: "Never country had such fortune, as men call fortune, as this, in its geography, its history, and its majestic possibilities.[6]

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[5]Emerson, "Progress of Culture," Letters and Social Aims, Vol. VIII of Works, pp. 221-22.

[6]Emerson, "The Fortune of the Republic," Miscellanies, Vol. XI of Works, p. 412.

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